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By the book: Advice and female behavior in the eighteenth-century South

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**BY THE BOOK:
ADVICE AND FEMALE BEHAVIOR
IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOUTH**

**A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia**

**In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by
Catherine M. Kerrison**

1999

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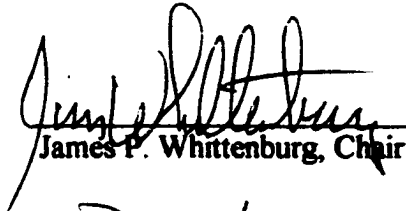
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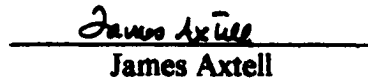

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**For my children, Justin, Elizabeth, and Sarah Foster,
whose love and unwavering confidence in me
has sustained me throughout.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	ix
CHAPTER I: HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WOMEN AND PRINT.....	2
CHAPTER II: "TO BE A DUTIFUL AND OBEDIANT WIFE": TRADITIONAL ADVICE IN ENGLAND AND THE EARLY AMERICAN SOUTH.....	57
CHAPTER III: THE DISSEMINATION AND READING OF TRADITIONAL ADVICE IN THE SOUTH.....	116
CHAPTER IV: THE ROLE OF THE NOVEL IN ENGLAND AND THE EARLY AMERICAN SOUTH.....	186
CHAPTER V: READING NOVELS IN THE SOUTH.....	229
CHAPTER VI: REFASHIONING FEMININITY.....	282
CONCLUSION: TAKING UP THE PEN.....	337
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	343

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**BY THE BOOK: ADVICE AND FEMALE BEHAVIOR
IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOUTH**

ABSTRACT

What did it mean to be a white female in the eighteenth-century South? This dissertation proposes an answer to this question by using the most widely circulated prescriptive literature (sermons, conduct-of-life advice, newspaper essays, and novels) for women and examining the ways in which women responded to it. In an age in which the focus of female education was identity rather than vocational training, this burgeoning literature was fraught with meaning for women, for it was the source of their understanding of themselves and how they should live their lives. This project shows how women were selective consumers of the literature they read: accepting some ideas, rejecting others, and ultimately constructing their own codes of conduct. It is a difficult problem to discern women's reading of the advice, since very few women identified their reading or left behind analyses of it. Using familiar sources such as inventories, wills, accounts, church records, letters, and diaries in creative ways, however, it is possible to perceive ways that women's reading figured in their lives. Self-effacing postures, even with other women, show the expected influence of traditional advice; but the example of alternate behavior such as that of two young women who refused to shun a friend disgraced by her seduction by a French officer reveals a complexity to women's behavior that the prescriptive literature never does. In the convergence of religious and secular prescriptive literature by the end of the century, women found the warrant to *create* as they became producers rather than merely consumers of advice literature, and in so doing, formulated their own model of femininity.

BY THE BOOK:
ADVICE AND FEMALE BEHAVIOR
IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOUTH

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WOMEN AND PRINT

*"You build a world in what you say;
Words –as I speak or write them-
make a path on which I walk."*
Diane Glancy¹

Evolution of the Project

What did it mean to be a white female in the eighteenth-century South? There were plenty of guideposts and advisors willing to answer that question: law, prescriptive literature, clergymen, essayists, husbands, and fathers. Attempting to answer this question for a twentieth-century audience, this project begins by reading the advice literature popular in the eighteenth-century Anglo-American world. Identifying prescriptive literature available in the Southern colonies, primarily Virginia, it examines sermons, straightforward conduct-of-life advice (what I term traditional advice), as well as novels, serials, and short stories (new advice), analyzing the literature's teachings for women and pointing out their theoretical foundations in Scripture and nature. In a world that offered little formal education for men, much less for women, advice literature comprised the core readings for women in a curriculum that focused on identity rather than vocation.

¹ Diane Glancy, quoted in Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 154.

Important as the advice literature is, however, it only begins to tell the story; assessing its influence on southern women is also crucial. Discerning how women read and internalized this literature is a difficult problem. Few southern women left written records of any kind, let alone reactions to their reading, so the student looks at all clues: accounts from a British agent listing novels sent to a Baptist purchaser; the letters of two young women who take on make-believe names in their effort to imitate the romantic language of sentimental novels; a South Carolina woman who fills four little notebooks with her account of her parents' courtship and her own; a Virginia woman who writes for her unborn child a conduct-of-life advice to serve as a surrogate parent if she died before the child reached adulthood. Searching patiently and with care, it is possible to find subtle evidence to show the ways the circulating literature influenced how women saw themselves and lived their lives.

This project is the result of a convergence of personal experience, interests, and discoveries. Returning to school after a sixteen-year hiatus, I found that history was not what it used to be: the "new social history" offered a perspective on history that I found compelling. It eschewed the history of "the quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all," that Jane Austen had found so vexing.² Instead, social historians viewed groups and individuals previously marginalized in textbooks as prisms through which to view and understand larger cultural and social structures. Social history offered a dazzling array of choice to a mother of three young children who discovered burgeoning fields of scholarship

² Austen, Jane, *Northanger Abbey* (Cutchogue, New York: Buccaneer Books, Inc., 1976), 46.

in subjects closest to her experience and interests: the histories of childhood, the family, education, religion, and women.

Robert Gross's seminar, "The History of the Book," began the process that led to my research topic and helped me define an exciting and different approach to the study of women. During the course of the seminar, it became clear to me how print both manipulates and is manipulated and how critically important the written word is in the construction of self. Cathy Davidson's *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* tied this theme to women's reading in the early national period; her work was the inspiration for the approach I have adopted to study women in the eighteenth-century South.³ My first effort to use this perspective resulted in my essay, "By the Book: Eliza Ambler Brent Carrington and Conduct Literature in the Late Eighteenth Century," which appeared in *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* in 1997.⁴

My initial research underscored both the authority of the printed word and the power of cultural perceptions to mold it. I could see how conduct-of-life literature taught women what they knew about being female. It was not until I prepared an application for a Spencer Foundation fellowship in 1996, however, that I began to see this literature as women's education. The Spencer Foundation's emphasis on education motivated me to think of my project in those terms, crystalizing my approach to the conduct literature and the women who read it. Gerda Lerner's ideas on the "educational disadvantaging of women" in *Creation of a Feminist Consciousness From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* contributed an important

³ Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: the Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁴ Catherine Kerrison, "By the Book: Eliza Ambler Brent Carrington and Conduct Literature in the Late Eighteenth Century," in *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 105 (Winter 1997), 27-52.

theoretical foundation.⁵ As she showed how women have suffered from the relentless reinforcement of the dogma of their inferiority by both church and secular authorities, I realized that the most formative education women received was their learning for identity. Their “classrooms” were their homes and other informal settings; and their texts were advice manuals, short stories, and, by the latter half of the eighteenth century, sentimental novels.

Recent scholarship on how women learn combined with feminist literary theory, on both religious and secular subjects, offered me a way to comprehend the enormous weight advice literature carried for eighteenth-century readers. I saw that the process by which women have had to translate works addressed to men (the Bible, for example) was greatly complicated, if not completely blocked, by almost universal assumptions of women’s inferior capacities. All these considerations formed the backdrop for the question of the reception of the literature in the eighteenth-century South.

The task before me was clear. Grounded in the prescriptive literature and equipped with the tools to read it I began first to identify the works available in the Southern colonies (with a particular emphasis on Virginia) and to assess their availability. In what forms did the advice appear? How easily accessible was it? Did women receive the messages it contained if they could not read and if so, how? The next step was analyze the messages of the literature (authorial intent) and how they were received (reader response). Following the work of social historians whose methodology has yielded a wealth of information about life in colonial America, I searched the archives for the scattered fragments of women’s lives; dipped into the court minutes to hear their voices in male-centered institutional records; and

⁵ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

attempted in my reading of their literature and their lives to wed intellectual and cultural history with social history. This marriage is a metaphorical reflection of the development of women's history that began in the nineteenth century with a focus on the observable activities of notable women, but that is infinitely more complex today. Since this project rests on decades of work in women's history, a review of the major trends in the field follows.

Historiography of Women and Gender

One of the dominant themes in women's history is how their stories should be woven into the larger tapestry of a nation's history. The first attempts were to add them, as perhaps a few decorative motifs, to an already existing body of knowledge. Typically these were compensatory efforts, such as Sarah J. Hale's 1853 record of "All Distinguished women from 'the Beginning' till A.D. 1850." It is significant that Hale thought that such a record could be compiled in a single work. During the same decade, Elizabeth Ellet wrote about individual women during the American Revolution. The spotlight on 'distinguished' women left the history of the masses of ordinary women quite in the dark.

The woman movement of the late nineteenth century opened the question of women's participation in history. As women as a group became a more visible force for social reform, they wrote books that reflected these struggles.⁶ More complex than the earlier compensatory histories, they extended the boundaries of women's history to include groups of women such as Katherine Anthony's *Mothers Who Must Earn* (1914). It was then but a

⁶ Linda Gordon's essay, "U.S. Women's History," lists several works of the early twentieth century that she describes as "more sociological than historical." Even so, they were significant for publicizing women's issues in the public sector, and not incidentally, serve as important primary source documents for women's historians today. Linda Gordon, "U.S. Women's History," American Historical Association publication.

short step, in the euphoria of acquiring the suffrage, to books which harkened back to another “golden era” for women, most notably Elisabeth Anthony Dexter’s *Colonial Women of Affairs*, published in 1924. Collecting evidence of women’s active presence in the workplace, in spaces other than the domestic sphere, Dexter postulated a thesis that was the starting point for historians of women for forty years. Confusing their labor with status, she deduced that women in the colonial period who worked as shopkeepers, innkeepers, or in trades, enjoyed greater freedom, power, and respect in their society than did their nineteenth-century daughters and granddaughters who were confined to their homes in a constraining domesticity. Newly enfranchised women of the twentieth century could look back, beyond the nineteenth century to the eighteenth, for examples of other ways in which they could broaden their own domestic horizons.⁷ Mary Beard’s *Woman as a Force in History* appeared in 1946, elaborating upon Dexter’s themes in a powerfully different way. Whereas Dexter focused upon working women’s economic power, Beard focused upon women rulers to illustrate her thesis that through their political participation, women had been a “force in history.” The reason this fact had been ignored for so many centuries, Beard claimed, was that women had been battered so relentlessly with the evidence of their inferiority, they were unable to see themselves as anything but secondary. By placing women in this broader historical context, Beard insisted that women be integrated into mainstream history.

All of the foregoing work represented attempts at a concept that was entirely new to the practice of history, namely that women had any history at all. Excavating the evidence was a beginning; so too was the exalting of women who had been extraordinary in terms of

⁷ Julia Cherry Spruill’s *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (reprinted New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972) first published in 1938, was another exhaustive search for women. Although heavier on description than analysis, it remains the starting point for women’s historians in the South.

their economic or political power. Even so, women's history remained outside the pale of any male Progressive historians' treatments of the big questions of American history. It was not until the civil rights movement and the emergence of a new women's movement in the 1960s that the beginnings of a new wave of women's history began.⁸ Fueled by seminal feminist publications such as Simone Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, women's historians began asking new questions of their theories and evidence, beyond.⁹ By the end of the 1970s, Gerda Lerner had mapped out the challenges of "placing women in history," demonstrating that the venture would be a more complex matter than any compensatory history would ever be able to satisfy.¹⁰

The establishment of National Organization for Women was a recognition that in spite of the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 which barred discrimination on the basis of race or sex, the battle was not over. The revived feminist movement was divided over the direction it should take: equality feminists, acknowledging the male structures of the world,

⁸ See Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) on the transformation of the nineteenth-century woman movement into the women's movement. Aileen S. Kraditor's *The Ideas of the woman Suffrage Movement 1890-1920* (1965; reprinted New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981) and Anne Firor Scott's *The Southern Lady From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) trace the early years of the woman movement.

⁹In an important caveat to these comments on women's experience in America, Paula Giddings has commented that "Friedan's observation that 'I never knew a woman, when I was growing up, who used her mind, played her own part in the world, and also loved, and had children' seemed [to black women] to come from another planet." Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Press, 1984), 299.

¹⁰ Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," in *The Majority Finds its Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 5-14. Among some of the issues Lerner addressed were the problems of addressing women's history within a male-defined conceptual framework; the limitations of family history in exploring women's history; and periodization, concluding with the problems of categorizing women as a 'sub-group.'

argued for equal rights for women within it; difference feminists, rejecting those structures and confident of a female culture that was distinct from it, fought for sex-based privileges such as paid maternity leaves, childcare benefits, and the like. And they began to chronicle the movement that reflected their differences in approach: William Chafe, for example, wrote *The American Woman* from an equality viewpoint, while Rosalind Rosenberg's *Divided Lives* represents the difference view.¹¹

Chafe's and Rosenberg's histories chart feminism in the twentieth century in ways that follow the content of their story, namely, with a heavy political focus. But how to write women's history for a period in which women were so conspicuously excluded from the political sphere? With Dexter's "golden era" thesis still the reigning work on eighteenth-century women, historians looked more closely at the nineteenth, in which it was easier to perceive distinct male and female spheres. Barbara Welter's "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860" was a thorough survey of magazines, gift books, women's diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, and novels yielded the model of true womanhood.¹² Typified by the virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, the antebellum woman was firmly entrenched in her home, the fortress of all values American men claimed to hold dear (but ignored in *their* sphere). Literature and sermons may have elevated women to a degree "little less than the angels," but, Welter argued, the assignation of women to the domestic sphere

¹¹ Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992); William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972). The fight over the Equal Rights Amendment revealed deep fissures in women's thinking about sex, gender, and equality. See, for example, Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron DeHart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹² Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* (1966), 151-174.

was in fact a vehicle for denigration. All arguments for freedom of will and respect for female intellectual abilities were crushed with this ideology. Welter's essay was a powerful indictment of the postwar glorification of female domesticity.

In the late 1970s, Nancy Cott took a more positive view of the separate spheres Welter described. *The Bonds of Womanhood* examined women's work, domesticity, religion, and education, confirming the existence of separate spheres, but arguing that women were able to find much in their relationships with each other that was valuable and enriching. Indeed, Cott argued, such sisterly solidarity laid the groundwork for a kind of group consciousness that eventually gave rise to the reform movement.¹³ Similarly, Carroll Smith-Rosenburg described a specifically female world that arose from such rigid sex-role differentiation in which women, emotionally segregated from men, formed relationships that in Smith-Rosenburg's words, "had an essential integrity and dignity . . . that . . . retained a constancy" between the 1760s and the 1870s.¹⁴ Nancy Cott's "Passionless: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850" showed how female passionlessness worked in contradictory ways, denying women's sexuality, yet affording them great moral influence over men.¹⁵ Whether one interprets the separate sphere model as constraining or liberating, it emphasized a female culture decidedly apart from a masculine one which, not incidentally, still kept women's history out of the mainstream.

¹³ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

¹⁴ Carroll Smith-Rosenburg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," in Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 60.

¹⁵ Nancy F. Cott, "Passionless: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Signs* 4 (1978), 219-236.

Even as historians of the nineteenth century struggled to come to terms with gender theories and its application to antebellum women, historians of the colonial period were working on ways to explain apparent contradictions between seventeenth-century images of women and the realities of their lives. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich broke out of the separate sphere model in *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* as she described how men's and women's work overlapped in ways that could not be disentangled into neatly separated gendered categories. For example, using the contemporary term, "deputy husband," Ulrich showed how New England men could expect their wives to handle complex business matters in their absence, without fear of upsetting the patriarchal order. Ulrich demonstrated how to eliminate presentist assumptions that such activities denoted a "liberated" colonial woman.¹⁶

The model Welter and others developed of separate spheres was useful in deepening the discussion about women from charting their deeds to discussing their thoughts, beliefs, and relationships. Joan Wallach Scott rejected its utility twenty years later, however, when she pointed out that gender as an analytical category promised a more useful way to study women, because it assumed interactions between men and women that the separate spheres model did not.¹⁷ Linda Kerber also pointedly questioned the utility of the model in her 1988 essay, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's

¹⁶ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982). Indeed, in her second book, *A Midwife's Tale, The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary 1785-1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), Ulrich discovered that the same themes, namely colonial goodwife and overlapping male and females spheres, prevailed in the life of midwife Martha Ballard in Maine in the early years of the republic.

¹⁷ Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 32.

History.” While the idea of separate spheres “enabled historians to move the history of women out of the realm of the trivial and anecdotal into the realm of analytic social history,” Kerber concluded that it was an approach that was “constrained.” Kerber quoted Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo’s argument that a model based upon two opposing spheres was inherently weak because it emphasized “difference and apartness” rather than women in relationship with men and with other women.¹⁸ It was, perhaps, a surprising argument for the author of *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* to make. In that book, Kerber had argued that women had forged for themselves their own meaning of the Revolution and their place in the Republic which followed. Excluded from politics despite the “strongly politicizing experiences” of the war, women seeking an identity in the infant nation found it in the concept of “Republican Motherhood.”¹⁹ Although the role transformed American women’s work as child-rearers into public service, it also relegated them to the confines of their homes. Kerber’s argument that women created “Republican Motherhood” to integrate themselves into a system dominated by their fathers, husbands, and sons notwithstanding, her evidence demonstrated the divergence in men’s and women’s experience after the Revolution.

Kerber had grappled with an important question in American women’s historiography, namely the impact of the Revolution upon women’s lives. Assessing the issue from a political vantage point, she concluded that while women remained disfranchised, their role as Republican mothers elevated the value of their domestic work. Mary Beth

¹⁸ Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *Journal of American History* 75 No. 1 (June, 1988), 37.

¹⁹ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 11.

Norton arrived at a similar conclusion, although from a different perspective, in *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. An examination of 438 manuscript collections convinced Norton that colonial Americans (both men and women) were thoroughly convinced of women's inferior capacities, but as the experience of men's wartime absences forced women to assume responsibilities for 'outdoor affairs,' women discovered new capacities within themselves to run home, farm, and trade. Post-revolutionary letters reflect the new-found confidence of these wartime successes.²⁰

Although both Kerber and Norton proposed to treat women of all thirteen colonies, their work reflects the regional imbalance of their evidence that heavily favored the North. In the South, Julia Cherry Spruill's *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (1938) remained the standard work for many years. By the late 1970s, however, the meticulous researches of Lois Green Carr, Lorena S. Walsh, Darrett and Anita Rutman, and others began to bear fruit in their studies of family life in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake, revealing women's lives as well. A skewed sex ratio and appallingly high mortality rates dictated a pattern of life in which marriages rarely lasted more than ten years, ending with the death of a spouse (more often the husband); blended families were the norm rather than the exception; widows inherited estates which they protected for their children's future interests.²¹

²⁰ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980). Although Norton's assessment of the Revolution's impact on women's lives was more sanguine than Kerber's, both historians diverged from what had been the conventional wisdom, typified by Joan Hoff-Wilson, that the Revolution had effected little change. Joan Hoff-Wilson, "The Illusion of Change: Women and the Revolution," in Alfred Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (De Kalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 383-445.

²¹ Lorena S. Walsh, "'Till Death Us Do Part': Marriage and the Family in the Seventeenth Century," in Thad W. Tate and David L. Ammerman, eds., *The Chesapeake in the*

The chaotic conditions of the seventeenth century gave way to stability in terms of increased life expectancy and a more stratified social order undergirded by legislation that sharply delineated the place of every person, male and female, black and white.²² This order

Seventeenth Century: Anglo American Society and Politics (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 126-152 and Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "The Planter's Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d Ser., 34 (1977) 542-571. See also, Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, "'Now-Wives and Sons-in-Law': Parental Death in a Seventeenth Century Virginia County," in *ibid.*, 153-182 and the Rutmans' expanded study of Middlesex County, Virginia, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984), 94-127, which describes the networks of kin and neighbors that developed in such context of parental death and remarriage. On this subject, see also Lorena Walsh, "Community Networks in the Early Chesapeake," in Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan, and Jean B. Russo, eds., *Colonial Chesapeake Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 200-241. On parental bequests see Lois Green Carr, "Inheritance in the Colonial Chesapeake," in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Women in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 155-208. Jean Butenhoff Lee describes parental bequest patterns in the eighteenth century, finding that parents increased their bequests of land and slaves to daughters during and after the Revolution in attempt to protect them in the absence of their men, in "Land and Labor: Parental Bequest Practices in Charles County, Maryland, 1732-1783," in *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, 306-341.

²² The following works trace the changing fortunes in the legal status of women. For an overview of the variations from colony to colony, see Mary Lynn Salmon's *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986). Linda Sturtz examines women's legal capacities in colonial Virginia from the vantage point of power-of-attorney rights in "'Madam & Co.': Women, Property, and Power in Colonial Virginia," (Ph.D. dissertation, Washington University, 1994). See also, Joan R. Gundersen and Gwen Victor Gampel, "Married Women's Legal Status in Eighteenth-Century New York and Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d Ser., 39 (1982), 114-134; Mary Beth Norton, "Gender, Crime, and Community in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," in James A. Henretta, Michael Kammen, and Stanley N. Katz, eds., *The Transformation of Early American History: Society, Authority, and Ideology* (New York: Knopf, 1991); Helen Mast Robinson, "The Status of the Femme Covert in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," (M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia, 1971); Carole Shammas, Marylynn Salmon, and Michel Dahlin, *Inheritance in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Linda E. Speth, "More than her 'Thirds': Wives and Widows in Colonial Virginia," *Women and History* 4 (1983), 5-42. The primary source to consult on Virginia legislative history is William W. Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619*. 13 volumes. (New York, 1823; reprinted Charlottesville, 1969).

was impressed upon Virginia institutions and even architecture. Court days, gentry processions into churches on Sunday mornings, plantation hospitality, even gatherings for horse races, made visible a hierarchical order no one could miss. The grandiose courthouse was a central feature of any county (indeed “towns” were named after the courthouse). A suppliant approached a raised bench, from which the collective justice of the county’s leading men was dispensed.²³ The raised pulpits of Anglican churches commanded attention to the Word of God, but the king’s arms over the altar tablets left no doubt as to whose word was final.²⁴ With a tenacity that defied the disorder of the first seventy years of Virginia settlement, patriarchy reasserted itself with a vengeance during the first half of the eighteenth century, a significant change from, in Daniel Blake Smith’s words, a seventeenth-century form of ‘widowarchy.’²⁵ The cracks and challenges would appear later.

Studies of the Chesapeake necessarily embraced the increasing slave population as well. While magisterial works described the development of slavery in the South, with its accompanying social, legal, and cultural implications, and explained the paradox of Virginia slaveholders leading a revolution against tyrannical masters, others looked at daily plantation

²³ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982; Reprinted New York: W. W. Norton, 1988). On male gentry culture in eighteenth-century Virginia, see also T. H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) and Michal J. Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman: Cultural Legitimacy in Plantation America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

²⁴ Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

²⁵ Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Plantation Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 79.

life itself.²⁶ Again, these began with studies of the antebellum era (where sources are more plentiful). Catherine Clinton, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Jacqueline Jones, to name but a few, examined the complexities of relationships between white antebellum women and their slave women.²⁷ White mistresses did not live the idle lives portrayed in romanticized pictures of the South. Mistresses worked long hours supervising their slaves' work, producing clothing for them, training them, doctoring them. All women, black and white, were subject to male authority in a society in which slavery helped to stabilize patriarchy in the South even as it was fading in the North.²⁸

Taken together, these works demonstrated the very limited utility of models based on the experience of northern women to the lives of women in the South. Nineteenth-century formulations of separate spheres and the "cult of domesticity" had no bearing in southern households, Fox-Genovese pointed out, for there was no separation of home and workplace. Ties of sisterhood that bound northern women in deeply emotional relationships that led to a collective female consciousness were non-existent in the South, where race divided white

²⁶ Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); on the development of slavery in South Carolina, Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974); and in Virginia, Allan Kulifoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*; Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

²⁷ Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

²⁸ Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," *American Historical Review* 89 (June, 1984), 613.

women from black more surely than their common subordination to male authority united them.²⁹ Indeed, Daniel Blake Smith showed how eighteenth-century southern white women identified more with their husbands, fathers, and sons, centering their emotional energy on their families which became increasingly affective after 1750.³⁰ Enslaved women in the colonial period were caught in what Joan Gundersen has described as the “double bonds of race and sex,” subject to white men by reason of both, while white women’s subordination was somewhat more subtle. Black women were forced to endure the sexual advances of their masters while southern wives turned a blind eye to their husbands’ relations with women in the slave quarters. “If [for white women] the glove was velvet,” Mary Beth Norton commented, “the hand that held it was iron.”³¹

While the model of separate spheres was ill suited to the evolving slave society in Virginia, it served a useful conceptual purpose in raising questions about women’s lives there. Women’s experiences in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake differed markedly from their sisters in New England and England; white Chesapeake women had greater freedom of choice in their spouses; they had shorter marriages, frequently marrying two or three times; they often became property-owners with their husbands’ death, responsible for managing

²⁹ Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (1984; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985).

³⁰ Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

³¹ Joan Gundersen, “The Double Bonds of Race and Sex: Black and White Women in the Colonial Virginia Parish,” *Journal of Southern History* 52 (1986), 351-372; Norton, “Evolution of White Women’s Experience,” 613. For the impact of the Revolution on enslaved women, see Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) and Jacqueline Jones, “Race, Sex, and Self-Evident Truths: The Status of Slave Women during the Era of the American Revolution,” in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, *Women in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 293-337.

both their children and their estates. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, women's experience of patriarchy, north and south, had met and begun to diverge again, as patriarchy became weaker in New England, adapted new forms in England, and became stronger, by the early nineteenth century, in the South.³² The greatest point of divergence, of course, was the presence of slavery.

But even if separate spheres did not offer a theoretical basis for understanding southern women's lives, it did lead to questions that further refined our perspective. For example, if the home and the workplace were not separate, did that preclude the development of a female culture? Indeed it did not, as several historians have discovered in their studies of female networks in the South.³³ Nor was analysis of female culture confined to white women; Jacqueline Jones, Allan Kulikoff, and Mechal Sobel have all shown ways in which enslaved women forged community within the slave quarters.³⁴

The separate spheres model has also led to much more sophisticated questions about the dichotomy between public and private spaces, indeed, how even to define those terms. The most cursory attempt at definition assigns men to public spaces understood as masculine domains, such as State offices, courts, workplace, taverns, and streets; the home is understood to be both the female domain and private. But such a simplistic view is

³² Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience;" Ulrich, *Good Wives*. These developments in England are discussed, below.

³³ See, for example, Joan Gundersen, "Kith and Kin: Women's Networks in Colonial Virginia," in *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 90-108; Lorena Walsh, "Community Networks in the Early Chesapeake," in Carr, Morgan, and Russo, eds., *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, 200-241; and Darrett and Anita Rutman, *A Place in Time*, 94-127.

³⁴ Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*; Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*; Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

confounded immediately as one discovers women testifying in the courtroom, engaging in barter, keeping shops, gossiping, all of which activities can have political impact as well. Southern plantation life, where work and home are the same place, also raises questions about who actually controls the domestic sphere. Such conventional views of 'public' and 'private' also have muddled theoretical discussions, as Leonore Davidoff explained that the "public/private divide has played a dual role as both an *explanation* of women's subordinate position and as an *ideology* that constructed that position."³⁵

What the terms public/private meant to contemporaries is an important consideration as well. Lawrence Klein consulted the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the entry for 'public' and found ten columns' worth of meaning. In eighteenth-century England, public could refer to the State, against which 'private' meant anything not related to it. But public life encompassed more than just office-holders. Public could also mean "pertaining to the shared or the common or pertaining to society as a whole." Civic life could then be inclusive of both sexes; 'public' spheres could be economic, social, and cultural as well. Public matters in eighteenth-century usage were those open to general participation; 'private' matters were closed, secret. Therefore, Klein concluded, "the private and the public did not [necessarily] correspond to the distinction between home and not-home."³⁶

³⁵ Leonore Davidoff, "Regarding some 'Old Husbands' Tales': Public and Private in Feminist Theory," in Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender & Class* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 227.

³⁶ Lawrence Klein, "Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (Fall 1995), 104-105. See also Linda J. Nicholson, *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), especially pp. 70-83, on the limits of equating 'private' with 'domestic.'

Mary Beth Norton further refined the second meaning of *public* by dividing the term into two subsets which she termed *formal public* (referring to state/church/authority) and *informal public* (referring to the community). The informal public might not always agree with the ruling authority, for example, a fact that an imprecise use of the term 'public' might obscure. More to the point for the present purpose is the manner in which Norton's terms are to be understood with respect to gender. The formal public in the colonies was composed exclusively of adult men; the informal public was much more inclusive and, in Norton's *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* women, as significant participants of the informal public, shaped colonial society. Seventeenth-century English colonists did not equate *private* and *family* with female, anymore than their English cousins did.³⁷ Norton described how the colonists drew upon a worldview, articulated by Sir Robert Filmer, that saw "family and state as analogous institutions," in which public activities could well take place within the setting of the family.³⁸ Not until the eighteenth century, Norton argued, did Americans begin to follow John Locke's lead and distinguish more clearly between public as state (and therefore male) and private as family (the female domain).

These theoretical distinctions are important when looking at colonial Virginia. Men met in numerous public venues, while women's public appearances were limited and

³⁷ Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 20-24. Mistress Margaret Brent, who acted as executrix for Maryland Governor Leonard Calvert's estate and demanded a vote in the assembly on that basis, is the lone exception to the male exclusivity of governmental power.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4. This is particularly true in the Chesapeake, where the scattered nature of settlement and the feeble reach of the church and state made the household (Norton's informal public) more autonomous with respect to maintaining order.

circumscribed. A woman appearing alone, Kathleen Brown has noted, “disturb[ed] the scripting of male hierarchies” as men wondered to whom she belonged. Virginia men preferred to preserve the fiction that they imprinted their identities upon their wives, rather than admit that their status might well depend upon successful alliances with women.³⁹ This patriarchal anxiety manifested itself in the fact that men disassociated women from public spaces. For example, no proper white woman went anywhere unescorted. Even the ordering of space and work within genteel households affirmed the planter’s “wife’s place in the domestic landscape as that of wife, mother, and hostess, duties that emphasized her relationship to him,” Brown explained, “and denied independent sources of female identity.”⁴⁰ With her work separated from the family’s living spaces, an elite woman became a prop of, rather than a participant in, male genteel culture.⁴¹

Ideas about what was public and private, and how they corresponded to proper male and female domains, may have varied in theory and expression throughout the colonial period, but the common thread of patriarchy persisted. It took different forms as it faced resistance from women, slaves, or dissenting religious sects. Kenneth Lockridge has studied

³⁹ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University Press of North Carolina, 1996), 281.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁴¹ Nowhere in Virginia do we find elite women taking advantage of their roles as hostess to promote a salon culture, as did women first in France, and later in England. David Shields has distinguished between the hospitality for which elite eighteenth-century Virginians were famous from the sociability that marked salon exchanges. “Whereas sociability promoted the free and friendly conversation of persons meeting in public space, hospitality organized social exchange under the auspices of family in its household,” with, of course, the attendant hierarchy of authority remaining in place. Indeed, Shields believes a salon after the French model did not appear in America until the 1780s and 1790s in Philadelphia. David Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 301; 119, fn. 32.

the misogynistic fear of William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson; the diaries of William Byrd and Landon Carter are replete with instances of subtle and not-so-subtle slave resistance; Rhys Isaac has described the threat of the Baptists to the social and political order in Virginia; Jay Fleigelman has traced the decline of patriarchal authority in the political and familial spheres; Kathleen Brown has combined race, class, and gender to show the challenges patriarchy faced in the eighteenth century.⁴² But the dominant theme of eighteenth-century gender studies is that patriarchy changed and adapted, so that while it may have adopted language that seemed to be paternalistic to promote domestic harmony, it remained, in Brown's words, "one face of patriarchy, not a softer replacement of it."⁴³

This changing face of patriarchy is a crucial point. Feminist theorists have taught us that patriarchy has never been a static formulation with timeless and unchanging characteristics. The apparent universality of the subordination of women throughout human history has until recently obscured the various forms that patriarchy has taken. In the process of questioning the persistence of male hegemony, theorists have become feminists. Linda Gordon defines 'feminist' broadly to include "those who disapprove of women's subordinate status, who believe that [it]...is not inevitable and can be changed, and who doubt the

⁴² Kenneth A. Lockridge, *On the Sources of Patriarchal Rage: The Commonplace Books of William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and the Gendering of Power in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712* (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1941); Jack P. Greene, ed., *The Diary of Landon Carter of Sabine Hall 1752-1778* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1965); Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*; Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs*.

⁴³ Brown, *Good Wives Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs*, 366.

‘objectivity’ of history as it has been previously written in a male-dominated culture.”⁴⁴

One way to re-write this history is to insist that gender be an important category of analysis.⁴⁵

It is often remarked that history is written by the winners. Precisely because history has been the province of the dominant male culture, an insistence that it be reworked is a double-edged sword. First, it poses an uncomfortable critique of a perspective that had been accepted as universal. Furthermore, it upsets the power structure, by shearing away one of its chief supports: its historical authority. In this way, feminism moved very quickly from theoretical construct to political discourse. As Toril Moi explains, feminism “is at once a relatively comprehensive analysis of power relations between the sexes, and the effort to change or undo any power system that authorizes and condones male power over women.”⁴⁶

When Gerda Lerner thought about the problem of the subordination of women and why women were slow to challenge it, she believed that the explanation lay in the “nature of the relationship of women to history.”⁴⁷ Denying a people (whether speaking of class, race, or sex) their history, denies them status, power, indeed, their very being. “Women’s history,” Lerner asserted, “is indispensable and essential to the emancipation of women.”⁴⁸ As she researched her *Creation of a Feminist Consciousness*, however, she found she needed to

⁴⁴ Linda Gordon, “U.S. Women’s History,” 3.

⁴⁵ See Scott, “Gender as a Useful Category of Analysis,” in *Gender and the Politics of History*.

⁴⁶ Toril Moi provides these useful distinctions between ‘feminism,’ ‘female,’ and ‘femininity,’ in “Men against Patriarchy,” in *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 182-4.

⁴⁷ Lerner, *Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, vii.

⁴⁸ Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 3. On this issue, feminists and historians of the Afro-American, Native American, and other minority experiences are in agreement.

know more about the origins and causes of female subordination that pre-dated the creation of written history (hence her 'detour,' the book that had to be written first: *Creation of Patriarchy*). How to explain why women, who are and have been half of the world's population, were virtually ignored when recording the making of civilization?

The answer lay in an historic creation called patriarchy, which Lerner defined as "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general." The invention of agriculture led to exchanges of women, not only to cement alliances but to produce more laborers. In this way, women became a resource; "by the second millenium B.C. in Mesopotamian societies, the daughters of the poor were sold into marriage or prostitution," Lerner observed, "in order to advance the economic interests of the family." Wealthier men commanded bride prices for their daughters. These gendered practices were expressed and legitimated in law and custom; further, Lerner continues, they "became part of the cultural construct and explanatory system."⁴⁹

Patriarchy perpetuated itself in various ways. Men wrote history and accepted it as universally applicable; without a history of their own, women had no tradition. Another more basic way was through language; "metaphors for gender have expressed the male as norm and the female as deviant," Lerner saw, "by making the term 'man' subsume 'woman' and arrogate to itself the representation of all humanity . . . they have not only missed the essence of whatever they are describing, but they have distorted it in such a fashion that they

⁴⁹ Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 239, 214, 212. Joan Kelly-Gadol agreed with this assessment when she urged that since "the privatizing of child rearing and domestic work and the sex typing of that work are social, not natural matters . . . we continue to look at *property relations* as the basic determinant of the sexual division of labor and of the sexual order." Joan Kelly-Gadol, "The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of

cannot see it correctly.”⁵⁰ Yet it is within these linguistic constructs, which were further legitimated by Judeo-Christian sacred writings, that women have had to attempt to describe their own experience and break out of patriarchal thought. Lastly, patriarchy has perpetuated itself by denying women education. Women expended much intellectual energy in recognizing how that deprivation explained women’s “inferiority,” and in pleading for and justifying women’s access to education. Because this point is a critical pivot to this project, we shall examine it in greater detail below.

Education

“What does a woman need to know?” feminist Adrienne Rich has asked.⁵¹ The answer, it turned out, could not have been more fundamental: interviews conducted by the four authors of *Women’s Ways of Knowing* convinced them “that every woman, regardless of age, social class, ethnicity, and academic achievement, needs to know that she is capable of intelligent thought, and she needs to know it right away.”⁵² What is so striking about these findings is that they appeared as recently as 1986, a full twenty years after the renewal of the women’s movement. Yet women still had not learned that they were intellectually capable.

Women’s History,” in Elizabeth Abel and Emily K. Abel, eds., *The Signs Reader: Women, Gender & Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 21.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 220.

⁵¹ Adrienne Rich, *On lies, secrets, and silence: Selected prose 1966-78* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), quoted in Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986), 193. I am indebted to Wendy Hamilton Hoelscher for this reference.

⁵² Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, 193. The authors’ interviews of 135 women produced five thousand pages of text; the subjects were recent college graduates, college students, and “students” in what the authors called “invisible college,” that is, “human service agencies supporting women in parenting their children,” 11-12.

“Male hegemony over the [cultural] symbol system took two forms,” Gerda Lerner believes. The “educational deprivation of women” was one; “male monopoly on definition” was the other.⁵³ For many feminists, the battle for female access to the same kind of educational opportunities open to men seemed to be the way to achieve equality of the sexes. Even so, some theorists questioned whether, in fact, such a goal was even desirable. “This access to a male dominated culture may equally be felt to bring with it alienation, repression, division,” Mary Jacobus has pointed out, “a silencing of the ‘feminine,’ a loss of women’s inheritance.”⁵⁴ Historically, secondary and post-secondary schools were created for male students. Thus the intellectual canon has been the predominately male-produced literature, history, art, music, and scholarship of Western culture. As women clamored for admission to this intellectual system, they had to learn how to learn in this environment; how to think critically, how to think in the argumentative debate formulation that has become the benchmark of a quality education.

Elaine Showalter has pondered this problem from a different view. When trying to determine if women have generated a ‘literature of their own,’ she admitted that “the theory of a female sensibility revealing itself in an imagery and form specific to women always runs dangerously close to reiterating the familiar stereotypes. It also suggests permanence, a deep basic, and inevitable difference between male and female ways of perceiving the world.” Instead, she argues, the female literary tradition comes from “the still-evolving relationships

⁵³ Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 219.

⁵⁴ Mary Jacobus, quoted in *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, 198.

between women writers and their society.”⁵⁵ This is not to argue that women should follow the centuries-old teachings that drew upon culture, science, and religion to prove their biologically determined inferior intellectual capabilities. Twentieth-century studies have shown that women have different ways of knowing and learning and writing than do men. As Cheri Register concluded, “Feminists do not deny that women exhibit group characteristics. However, they do not accept the thesis that similarities in female behavior are biologically determined.”⁵⁶

Significant work has been done on how men and women grow, mature, and learn. Michelle Rosaldo has shown how boys, taught to differentiate themselves from their mothers, grow away from them; learn how to be separate. Girls, on the other hand, continue to identify and develop deep attachments with the figure that raised them; indeed, they measure their value, their identity, and their success in life in terms of their relationships. Socialized in this way, it is hardly surprising to discover that there are male and female ways of learning within academic structures; *learned* ways of knowing. When girls approach secondary schools and college campuses, they must adjust (if not totally abandon) their way of learning for a different one. To use Elaine Showalter’s example, “a woman studying English literature is also studying a different culture, to which she must bring the adaptability of the anthropologist.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Elaine Showalter, “The Female Tradition,” in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds., *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 273.

⁵⁶ Cheri Register, “American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction,” in *Feminist Literary Criticism: Exploration in Theory*, Josephine Donovan, ed. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 13.

⁵⁷ Elaine Showalter, “Women Writers and the Double Standard,” in Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran, *Women in a Sexist Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 324.

These considerations about gendered ways of learning are relatively recent of course; until the 1970s psychologists categorized gender-related behaviors, so that one could draw inferences from a subject's behavior about his/her relative masculinity or femininity. An assertive woman, for example, was thought to have adopted a "masculine" trait that demonstrated her rejection of her female role. Psychological testing instruments based on these "masculine" and "feminine" traits presumed a continuum, in which men would cluster at one end and women at the other.⁵⁸ Even though psychologists rejected as nonsensical nineteenth-century warnings of physical trauma to women's reproductive systems from too much study, they continued to argue that men and women differed in temperamental qualities.⁵⁹

The intellectual community of the late twentieth century has only begun to struggle with these issues, to wrest cultural constructs from biological determinism, to question assumptions about gender roles that have prevailed for millennia, even to find the language that will enable us to break out of patriarchal thought. The changes wrought in the last three decades have been significant, yet as British feminist Janet Todd commented, "The arrival of a few women in academic high places has no more transformed the establishment of culture – not to mention the material condition of women's lives – than the arrival of the odd prime minister in Number 10 has transformed the social establishment."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Janet T. Spence, "Changing Conceptions of Men and Women: A Psychologists' Perspective," in Elizabeth Langland and Walter Gove, eds., *A Feminist Perspective in the Academy: The Difference it Makes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 132.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 134.

⁶⁰ Janet Todd, *Feminist Literary History* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 2.

The spectrum of thought on the “nature versus nurture” arguments about gender and how best to incorporate these findings into our practice of history, literature, teaching -indeed daily living- is vast. But at least the questions have been raised and acknowledged to be open-ended. How much more difficult was it for eighteenth-century women in England and British North America to question the constructs of their society that bore the sanction of divine imperative upon them?

For most English women, education meant preparation for marriage. The purpose of the “curriculum” was to teach proper moral values and a practical knowledge of housewifery. It was an education that took place, for the most part, outside institutional settings. The northern European Christian humanism movement of the early sixteenth century might have opened avenues to formal education for women, but its most eloquent spokesman, Erasmus, viewed education merely as a useful preventative of a young girl’s indulgence in “idleness and lascivious games.” There was little concern in his mind that education would create an unfortunate independence of mind; after marriage he believed, “A wife will respect a husband more whom she recognizes as her teacher.”⁶¹ This view of women’s education persisted throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1614 Daniel Turvil described parents who “will by no means endure that their daughters should be acquainted with any kind of literature at all. The pen must be forbidden them as the tree of good and evil.”⁶²

⁶¹ Erasmus, quoted in Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760, A Social History* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 178.

⁶² Daniel Turvil, *Asylum Veneris, or A Sanctuary for Ladies* (London, 1616), quoted in Angeline Goreau, *The Whole Duty of a Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985), 1.

Academic learning for women in England, then, took on a kind of patchwork quality: poor women were taught only what they needed to know to manage housework, either in their parents' homes or in service. Middling and upper-class women received a religious education in addition to practical housewifery skills; some were taught to read; writing was not considered necessary. For the most part, these skills were taught at home. Aristocratic girls were frequently sent to homes of other nobility (although this practice died out with the advent of girls' schools in the eighteenth century); a few received classical educations from tutors, employed by their fathers.⁶³ Literacy was just as unevenly distributed; women's signature literacy rates in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were practically nil. At the beginning of the Hanoverian period, about twenty-five percent of English women possessed signature literacy; that number rose about eight percent by mid-century.⁶⁴ Women in London were significantly more literate than rural women; David Cressy noted "a halving of illiteracy in the space of two generations" there between 1670 and 1720.⁶⁵

Generally, however, it was thought that the informal transmission of housewifery skills and just enough rudimentary reading ability to read the Bible satisfied women's educational imperatives. Neither the intellectual nor physical equal of men, women simply did not require more. These ideas of female incapacities were ancient; but they acquired a

⁶³ These patterns of education are ably summed up in Laurence's survey, *Women in England*, 165-171; Anthony Fletcher, "Educating Girls," in *Gender, Sex and Subordination In England 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 364-375; Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998), 131-32.

⁶⁴ David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 145.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 147. The illiteracy rate was 64% in the 1670s; that number was reduced to 44% in the 1720s.

firmer foundation with the scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century. Until that time a “one-sex” model had prevailed, in which the female body was believed to be a derivative form of the “canonical” male. Thomas Laqueur’s *Making Sex* shows how the discovery by the late seventeenth century of the difference between male and female reproductive systems gave a new rationale, that of immutable biology, for the centuries’ old explanation of the inferiority of women.⁶⁶ A weaker physical frame explained the weaker intellectual one. Women could not be expected to study the classics, sciences, politics, or mathematics – nor should they want to. Such masculine inclinations denoted a rejection of their female essence that could be catastrophic in the marriage market. Yet many women in Britain bristled at such intellectual circumscription. The struggle to redefine gender relations in eighteenth-century England was played out on many stages, one of the most visible of which was the printed word.

Gender in Eighteenth-Century England

Until the second half of the seventeenth century, conduct-of-life literature primarily addressed men. Devotional tracts appealed to both men and women, but books specifically directed to women tended to cover only such subjects as cookery and medicine. By mid-century, however, there was a pronounced increase in literature that advised women on the behavior required of them. Richard Brathwaite’s *The English Gentlewoman* (1631) was one of the earliest of these, urging women to observe their natural subjection to their husbands

⁶⁶ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989). For a slightly different view on the same conceptual developments, see Robert Martensen, “The Transformation of Eve: women’s bodies, medicine and culture in early modern England,” in *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality*, Roy Porter and Milulas Teich, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 107-133. While Martensen agrees with the general outlines of Laqueur’s thesis, Martensen sees the brain and nervous system (rather than the anatomy of genitalia) as the “key source of gender.”

that “begets in every family a harmonious order,” and to reflect that feminine submission in their eyes, speech, habits, even their gait.⁶⁷ This literature repeatedly urged women to remember the modesty required of their sex. Angeline Goreau points out that modesty was a consistent theme in the advice literature, whether it emanated from the highly conservative author of the *Ladies Calling* (originally published in 1658) or the more liberal Robert Codrington, who was an advocate for women’s education.⁶⁸ Modesty required that women distrust their understanding, deferring in all things to the reasoned judgment of their men.

The flood of prescriptive literature emanating from seventeenth-century English pens demands explanation. One plausible explanation links the discoveries about male and female anatomy with the growing literacy rates. The empiricism of science gained increasing credence; religion, magic, and superstition lost their explanatory power.⁶⁹ With support from the authority of science, the argument for women’s inferiority rested in her very body, with its incontrovertible and unchanging proof of difference from the male standard. Armed with this new evidence, conduct advice writers asserted imperatives of nature as well as God to explain the patriarchal order.

Prescriptive literature also sprang from the context of cataclysmic political and social changes in seventeenth-century England. Motivated by religious and familial concerns, many women had participated in the crisis that led to civil war. Leveler women even

⁶⁷ Richard Brathwaite, *The English Gentlewoman* (London, 1631), quoted in Goreau, *Whole Duty of a Woman*, 36.

⁶⁸ Goreau, *Whole Duty of a Woman*, 11-12. Codrington wrote *The Second Part of Youth’s Behaviour; or, Decency in Conversation Amongst Women* (1664).

⁶⁹ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971); David D. Hall has explored this transition in New England in *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

claimed the right of citizenship. The political developments surrounding the Glorious Revolution forty years later had a two-pronged effect on English conduct literature. As Margaret Hunt explained, the reigns of Charles II and James II had raised issues of private morality and public competence that the Revolution resolved only in part: it saved “the institution of the monarchy but dealt a severe blow to the belief that kings were above moral reproach.”⁷⁰ Critiques of the morals of the elite were everywhere, as a rising middle class appropriated a “Reformation of manners.”

Secondly, in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, Parliament pointedly excluded women from voting because of their sex. Mary Astell questioned John Locke’s contract theory with her famous question, “How if all men are born free are all women born slaves?” Locke’s elaboration of his understanding of the source of legitimate authority begged the question within family life: what was the authority a husband had over his wife? Other women writers, motivated by attacks upon women, appeared in print in essays and books that began as defenses of “the Sex” (a common phrase in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England), but developed by degrees into powerful assertions of women’s virtues and capabilities.⁷¹

Protesting, literate women were not alone in contributing to a sense of disorder during the second half of the seventeenth century. Poorer women were also a cause of concern for men: David Underdown’s study of Dorchester in the 1690s reveals that a major

⁷⁰ Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 178.

⁷¹ An excellent summation of these strains in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England and the historiography appears in Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 345-430. Mendelson and Crawford conclude that the “democratic paradigms of the rights of men and brothers excluded women more decisively than did patriarchal discourses,” 430.

preoccupation of the town fathers was to “keep women in their place: several were presented for masterlessness in 1699 and 1700.” Masterless women of all economic ranks presented grave challenges to the gender order that had so recently been reinforced in theory and law.⁷² In fact, the stridency of the literature’s emphasis over both centuries on the need for women to focus their intellectual, emotional, and physical energies upon their families and homes, strongly suggests that many women did not.

The extent to which patriarchal attitudes prevailed in England, indeed, even the utility of patriarchy as a theoretical tool with which to study this period, is a matter of considerable debate. Anthony Fletcher’s thesis in *Gender, Sex and Subordination* centered around patriarchy, arguing its malleability between 1500 and 1800, as men “reconstruct[ed] patriarchy on more effective foundations,” namely, a “construction of femininity as a prescriptive code of personal characteristics and behavior between the 1670s and 1800.”⁷³ Rather than viewing patriarchy as monolithic oppression, Fletcher shows its complexity as well as its adaptability.

Historians have looked at the many forms patriarchy has taken in order to ask whether the theme of continuity or of change has predominated in this period. One of the most obvious foci of examination has been the family. A structure with a male head of household to whom all other members defer, the family has long been subject to historians’ scrutiny as

⁷² David Underdown, *Fire From Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 263. Underdown sees such examples of disorderly behavior as symptomatic of the changes in English society that men responded to with increasingly rigid patriarchal attitudes. See also his essay, “The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England,” in Anthony Fletcher and J. Stevenson, eds., *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 116-36.

⁷³ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, 396.

the patriarch's bastion. Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* argued for change as he traced the development of the affective family, finding that by the eighteenth century an increasingly private, individual, loving family life portended both egalitarian relationships in those families and in the modern ones of our own day.⁷⁴

Although Stone's work was roundly criticized, the theme of change has persisted in the literature. Bridget Hill found that women's status did change in the eighteenth century, but for the worse. Taking an economic view, Hill concluded that the narrowing of women's laboring opportunities during the Industrial Revolution, forcing them into a private sphere, was a tremendous setback. Occupying a private sphere in which their work was not seen, much less acknowledged, women of eighteenth-century England were also deprived of their history.⁷⁵

Christopher Durston, on the other hand, argues for continuity in women's experience of patriarchy in the early modern period. Owning the difficulty in assessing the impact of the English Civil War upon domestic patriarchy, he concluded that "while the absolute authority of husbands and fathers was seriously questioned" in the mid-seventeenth century, "patriarchy remained a strong and widely exercised force."⁷⁶ Margaret J.M. Ezell agreed; despite a century characterized by "radical political change," patriarchy persisted, she believes, because of its looseness. While "Mary Astel and Mary More slipped through the

⁷⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). See critiques of Stone's thesis, Alan MacFarlane, review of Stone, *Family Sex and Marriage in History and Theory* 18 (1979) 103-126 and Ralph Houlbrooke *The English Family 1450-1700* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1984).

⁷⁵ Bridget Hill, *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 267.

⁷⁶ Christopher Durston, *The Family in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 178.

meshes to criticize the theory," Ezell explained, they "simultaneously admitt[ed] that they themselves had not been confined by its dictates of their limitations."⁷⁷ On balance, Valerie Frith decided after a survey of the eighteenth-century revolutionary movements and the pace of social and economic change, that the basic patriarchal structure of the family remained the same.⁷⁸

Other historians remain, in Margaret Hunt's description, "agnostic," regarding change versus continuity and rise versus decline. Hunt focused on the conflicts and tensions within family life, discovering in middle-class families the ways in which women worked out the disparity between cultural prescriptions for them and the reality of the market's intrusion into their lives.⁷⁹ Robert Shoemaker saw continuity in gender ideology in the fact that books such as *The Ladies Calling* and *Whole Duty of Man* went through numerous editions without change; but also noted the change wrought by evangelicals who stressed the "moral importance of women's domestic role."⁸⁰ Rosemary O'Day argued that historians need to appreciate the complexity of English families; better to appreciate the variety of experiences within them than be locked into a methodological model. Her own detailed account of

⁷⁷ Margaret J.M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 163.

⁷⁸ Valerie Frith, ed., *Women & History: Voices of Early Modern England* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1995), xv. Olwen Hufton also subscribes to the continuity model in her study of European women, *The Prospect Before Her: a History of Women in Western Europe 1500-1800* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

⁷⁹ Hunt argued that the market intruded into the heart of English middling families, bringing all the conflicts and strains of change with it. "Eighteenth-century middling culture," Hunt concluded, "was as much about a failure to live up to widely accepted moral norms as about their adoption." Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 217.

⁸⁰ Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998), 32. *The Ladies Calling* went through a dozen editions between 1673 and 1787, 22.

family life over four centuries showed how “individuals within the family struggled to achieve a tolerable existence within the bounds set by their culture” – and by their relatives.⁸¹ Such contexts are ignored, she warned, at the historian’s peril.

Evaluations of the persistence of patriarchy run headlong into the model of separate spheres that has been so powerful in American historiography. English historians have discerned separate spheres in nineteenth-century English gender relations and have looked back for its origins to industrialization in the late eighteenth century.⁸² But historians of gender in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England have disagreed on the utility of this model as well. For Robert Shoemaker, the emergence of separate spheres was the driving methodological question of his synthesis. He concluded that in fact, the “spheres were never truly separate;” instead he saw an accentuation of gender roles, both male and female. “Men, too, were limited by the new moral climate,” Shoemaker pointed out.⁸³

Several historians of eighteenth-century England have gone beyond the boundaries of the separate spheres model. Margaret Hunt argued that her evidence transcended it entirely; her study of the market and the middling class showed that public commerce pierced the privacy of the family. Not that separate spheres was implausible, Hunt acknowledged; she did fear, however, that it glossed over the intricate ways in which men’s and women’s lives overlapped.⁸⁴ Linda Colley’s study of the development of “Britishness” between 1707 and 1837 saw that the stridency of the English press against women’s political activism revealed

⁸¹ Rosemary O’Day, *The Family and Family Relationships 1500-1900* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994).

⁸² See for example Bridget Hill, *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics*.

⁸³ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 316-318.

⁸⁴ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 8-9.

how very permeable the boundaries separating men and women actually were: “increasingly prescribed in theory,” Colley observed, “yet [they were] increasingly broken through in practice.”⁸⁵ Amanda Vickery rejected the model outright in her study of elite women in northern England. Although her book was a “reconstruction . . . of lives lived within the bounds of propriety,” she argued that those bounds were wider than has been thought heretofore. A culture of politeness opened worlds of reading, letter writing, and lives lived in the public terrain of assemblies, concerts, plays, and other entertainments (including, eventually, salons) that women shared with men. In her attention to these venues, Vickery’s conception of ‘public’ mirrors the eighteenth-century usage Lawrence Klein has described, and considerably expands upon our understanding of women’s prominent place within it.⁸⁶

Anglo-American Print Culture

What this most recent scholarship makes clear is that the lives of eighteenth-century English women do not conform comfortably to prevailing theoretical models. As Margaret Hunt reminds us, we should never confuse the lives of women with the prescriptive literature that was generated for them.⁸⁷ Conduct literature may have tried mightily to keep women bound to their hearths, but it is probably better understood as a reaction to the challenges posed by women who were very much a part of the public sphere.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 250.

⁸⁶ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 12.

⁸⁷ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 75.

⁸⁸ Indeed, Lawrence Klein makes the point that efforts to domesticate women “cannot fully explain the subordination of women, because there was a space in the public sphere for them.” Lawrence E. Klein, “Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere in early eighteenth-

One of the ways in which gender roles were unsettled, if not challenged, was in print. It would be simplistic to assume that the act of writing denoted liberation from the patriarchal model; women wrote to support it as well as to decry it.⁸⁹ Nor should we assume that the act of reading was always emancipatory either; while literacy certainly increased in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Margaret Hunt observed, “we possess few details about what this actually meant in people’s lives.”⁹⁰ Still, women’s increased participation in English print in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has commanded attention.

Publication assumed numerous forms during this period and it did not always mean a printed format. Scribal publication –handwritten copy- was frequently a preferred medium, avoiding problems of censorship to be sure, but also as a way to avoid the “stigma” of print. At a time when womanly modesty forbade putting oneself forward in print, scribal publication offered a way to circulate writings “privately,” that is, among a select audience.⁹¹ Scribal publication was particularly congenial to women who wrote increasingly more letters during the seventeenth and eighteenth century as literacy rose. Dale Spender has argued that

century England,” in *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices*, Judith Still and Michael Worton, eds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 112.

⁸⁹ Kathryn Shevelow makes this point in *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (London: Routledge, 1989), 1. See also, Elizabeth Bergen Brophy’s contention that English women novelists “tended . . . to reinforce prevailing opinion and custom.” Elizabeth Bergen Brophy, *Women’s Lives and the 18th-Century English Novel* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991), 266.

⁹⁰ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 178.

⁹¹ Harold Love, *The Culture and Commerce of Texts: Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

women were particularly suited to writing conduct literature and eventually didactic novels (in epistolary form) precisely because of their letter-writing experience.⁹²

As Hilda Smith uncovered the work of seventeenth-century women writers, she discovered the origins of feminism. While the challenge of the English Civil War to the monarchy and theories of divine right to rule might seem to have been the best soil to yield the first fruits of feminism, Smith found that the most outspoken critics of the gender order were both Anglican and Royalist. What the war did provide, however, were the questions that women applied, not to the rule of the state but to the rule of their families. Seeing reason as a way out of their oppression, writers such as Aphra Behn and Mary Astell agitated for the education that would allow them to refine their intellects and earn broader power within their families. This first attempt at developing a feminist ideology floundered, Smith believes, because the writers' political sympathies circumscribed their ability to link their social critiques with political ones: Mary Astell, for example, abhorred the idea of revolution against authority, making a challenge to patriarchal authority within the home theoretically impossible.⁹³

For scholars interested in tracing feminism in English literature, the eighteenth century has been rife with paradox. On the one hand, writers extolled the civilizing influence of women upon men. Salons that fostered polite conversation and refined sensibilities arrived in England in the second half of the century; and the number of women writers

⁹² Dale Spender, ed., *Living By the Pen: Early British Women Writers* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 3-8.

⁹³ Hilda L. Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

increased over the century (although unevenly; the greatest rise occurred after 1780.)⁹⁴

Nevertheless, even the most eloquent appeals to improve women's lot asked only for better treatment from men rather than for any institutional change.⁹⁵ Indeed, most women's tracts, essays, and novels were bound by the patriarchal order and did not question the basic assumption of women's inferiority to men. What they did champion is what Cheryl Turner and Hilda Smith have termed "instrumental feminism." Women's inferiority, these writings argued, was the result of cultural conventions that precluded education rather than of any innate female ignorance. Remedy this situation, they advised, and society in general would be better served by rational, thinking wives and mothers. Even Mary Wollstonecraft, so maligned during her life for her radical views, equated education for women with successful families.⁹⁶ It is plain, then, that acts of writing, publishing, and protesting women's status did not necessarily signify antipatriarchalism, much less rebellion against the social order.

So why did women write? In efforts that cross disciplines, historians of print culture and literature scholars have begun to recover the world of English publication. The nine London newspapers with their 44,000 subscribers in 1704 had at least tripled in number by 1724. Women were quite visible in the trade as writers and printers, even (perhaps especially) in the somewhat risky opposition press. Most women entered the book trade as

⁹⁴ Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 38-39. See also Turner's charts that show a slump in production after 1740, rising again sharply after 1780; therefore, Turner concluded, "the growth in women's fiction was neither exponential nor continuous."

⁹⁵ Smith, *Reason's Disciples*, 59; Turner, *Living by the Pen*, 24.

⁹⁶ Turner, *Living by the Pen*, 70.

wives or widows of male stationers, rather than through the apprenticeship route men took.⁹⁷

Women writers came from all socio-economic ranks. Many wrote out of economic necessity, laboring to support families. So writing was much more than a leisure activity of the elite.⁹⁸

The increasing number of publishers in London provided more opportunity for the publication of women's works. Fiction became a reforming force and was much more interesting to read than traditional advice tracts.⁹⁹ Nor did writing fiction require a classical education, making it a medium accessible to women. Focused on moral imperatives, women writers turned the themes of conduct literature to their advantage, arguing that they were well suited by reason of their feminine nature to write conduct guides themselves. But while eighteenth-century women appear to have an advantage over their seventeenth-century predecessors, especially in terms of access to print, they did so at a price: the acceptance of their second-class status. Seventeenth-century feminism, based on values of reason, faded with the eighteenth-century glorification of sentiment.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Margaret Hunt, "Hawkers, Bawlers, and Mercuries: Women and the London Press in the Early Enlightenment," in *Women and the Enlightenment*, Margaret Hunt, Margaret Jacob, Phyllis Mack and Ruth Perry, eds. (New York: The Institute for Research in History and The Haworth Press, Inc., 1984), 42-44. By 1750, however, women printers were almost completely replaced by men; by 1850 women printers were gone completely.

⁹⁸ Nor was reading necessarily connected to idleness. Naomi Tadmor shows that in the middle-class households she examined, reading was connected to a "routine of work and of religion." Naomi Tadmor, " 'In the eve my wife read to me': women, reading and household life in the eighteenth century," in James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor, eds., *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 165.

⁹⁹ Turner, *Living by the Pen*, 85, 48.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, *Reason's Disciples*, 15, 203-206.

The print culture within which British women's writings flourished was more complex, however, than that of colonial America. Women's literacy rates in Virginia were low: no formal schooling apparatus existed for girls beyond tutors for the elite, field schools, and the occasional offerings that appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* to teach needlework, music, and dance, in addition to reading and writing.¹⁰¹ Nor did such elaborated social structures as the salon exist in colonial Virginia like those in London after 1750.¹⁰² There was no printer in Virginia until William Parks's arrival in 1730, nor a newspaper until the first appearance of his *Virginia Gazette* in 1736. This stood in contrast to English women of all ranks who flooded magazines with so many contributions that editors, unable to accommodate them all, were threatened by the irate authors if their pieces were not published.¹⁰³

Virginia may not have had a printer until the 1730s, but it did not follow that it was a colony without books or publication.¹⁰⁴ Seventeenth-century colonists brought as many as

¹⁰¹ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Inquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1974), 4, 73.

¹⁰² David Shields has uncovered a salon culture in colonial America; however it appeared in northern cities such as Philadelphia. Indeed, he contrasts the culture of *sociability* of the salons with that of *hospitality* that was found in Virginia's great houses. Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters*, 119.

¹⁰³ Jean E. Hunter, "The Ladies Magazine" and the History of the Eighteenth-Century Englishwoman," in Donovan H. Bond and W. Reynolds McLeod, eds., *Newletters to Newspapers: Eighteenth-Century Journalism* (Morgantown, West Virginia: School of Journalism, West Virginia University, 1977), 107-109. Hunter's essay also points to the relative luxury of sources—in print—that scholars of eighteenth-century English literature have over those who work in American print culture, especially for those seeking to understand readers' sensibilities in this period.

¹⁰⁴ Indeed, historians had often portrayed Virginia as devoid of intellectual life because of its lack of a press. See, for example, Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), viii, xii. Richard

20,000 books into the Chesapeake. Household libraries were small, typically less than five books, and generally religious in nature. These were not the inexpensive chapbooks of English popular culture: instead the Bible held prominence of place in these homes, followed many times in frequency by Richard Allestree's *Whole Duty of Man*. Virginians treasured these books, devising them from one generation to another, sharing the reading tastes of the middling class in England.¹⁰⁵ From the outset of colonization, David Hall notes, Virginians were "under the sway of metropolitan culture."¹⁰⁶

This became increasingly true in the eighteenth century. Virginia gentlemen consciously sought to emulate the lifestyle of English country gentlemen.¹⁰⁷ One of the most important ways in which they forged this cultural connection was in their reading tastes. Virginians imported their books directly, relying upon their English factors to supply them with books on all subjects from agriculture to classical literature to the latest novels. William

Beale Davis was one of the first to overturn this paradigm with his *Literature and Society in Early Virginia 1608-1840* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South 1585-1763* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 3 vols., and *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979).

¹⁰⁵ David Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 121.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰⁷ William Byrd is the classic example of this trend. On this point, see also Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*; Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); T. H. Breen, "Creative Adaptations: Peoples and Cultures," in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1984), 221. In support of his argument, Breen also cites John M. Murrin, "Anglicizing an American Colony: The Transformation of Provincial Massachusetts" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1966) and James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1977); Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994).

Parks fortuitously positioned himself to take advantage of the colonial desire for things English. Having founded his first newspaper in England in 1719, he maintained his English connections when he emigrated, “by which, upon all Occasions, I [would] be furnished with the freshest intelligence, both from thence, and other Parts of Europe,” for his American ventures.¹⁰⁸ When he founded the *Virginia Gazette* in 1736, not only did he draw upon English periodicals for material to fill his paper, he imported English imprints to sell in his print shop in the colonial capital of Williamsburg as well.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, colonial booksellers had found that false English imprints could sell local publications.¹¹⁰

In this way, a genteel literary culture developed in Virginia that depended on the cultural authority of the London metropolis. It was a culture that pointed to its books, encased in polished walnut shelves, not to note the number, but in Rhys Isaac’s words, “the[ir] symbolic potency in the life of the community.”¹¹¹ To be illiterate in this society, David Hall commented, was to be culturally inferior and excluded. Thus, the literary culture in eighteenth-century Virginia buttressed hierarchical social differences: William Byrd II’s

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in William David Sloan and Julie Hedgepeth Williams, *The Early American Press* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 99.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Manson Meyers, “The Old Dominion Looks to London,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 54 (1946); Gregory A. Stiverson and Cynthia Z. Stiverson, *Books Both Useful and Entertaining: A Study of Book Purchases and Reading Habits of Virginians in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century* (Williamsburg, Virginia: unpublished report of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1977); see also Stiverson and Stiverson, “The Colonial Retail Book Trade: Availability and Affordability of Reading Material in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” in William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench, eds., *Printing and Society in Early America*, American Antiquarian Society Program in the History of the Book in American Culture (Worcester, Mass., 1983), 132-73.

¹¹⁰ Stephen Botein, “The Anglo-American Book Trade before 1776,” in Joyce, ed., *Printing and Society in Early America*, 79.

¹¹¹ Rhys Isaac, “Books and the Social Authority of Learning,” in Joyce, ed., *Printing and Society in Early America* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), 230.

satirical description of the uncivilized North Carolinians who populate his *Secret History of the Dividing Line* described the great distance between the gentry and the commonfolk that he, as a gentleman, wished to exist. The language and classical allusions in the *Virginia Gazette* were the code of an exclusive “club” of gentlemen who grounded their authority in their reason and learning, contesting that of the pulpit.¹¹² Yet, Hall has pointed out, the evangelical preachers of the eighteenth century reversed genteel premises of cultural authority by insisting on the broad reach of the spirit. Preachers derived their authority from the simultaneous acts of speaking and writing when they preached without notes: truth sprang directly from God’s inspiration, not from a learned text. Which cultural authority prevailed in this tug-of-war is not always clear, but Hall has concluded that the “actual production and consumption of print in eighteenth-century America was closely bound up with the religious culture.”¹¹³ Charles Clark has speculated that Americans’ religious sensibilities may have been one reason why colonial newspapers “drew the line that separated the printable from the unprintable,” particularly with respect to sexual content, more narrowly than did the English press.¹¹⁴

Virginia is a perfect illustration of the point. Although hired to print government works, Parks printed such works as *A Short and Easy Method with the Deists: Wherein the Certainty of the Christian Religion is demonstrated by infallible Proof and Whole Duty of*

¹¹² See Rhys Isaac, “Books and the Social Authority of Learning,” in *ibid.*, for an extension of this point in his analysis of the Virginia court system which was presided over by the gentry whose authority was legitimated by their learning.

¹¹³ Hall, *Cultures of Print*, 153-62.

¹¹⁴ Charles E. Clark, *The Public Prints: The Newspaper in Anglo-American Culture, 1665-1740* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 238.

Man in 1732 and 1746, respectively.¹¹⁵ The struggles between reason and traditional religion were apparent in the Williamsburg press. That these religious issues mattered to Virginians is obvious also: Parks would not have printed these works unless he thought he could turn a profit on them. And yet literate Virginians imported as well, by the hundredweight, books on agriculture, classical studies, science, philosophy, history, advice literature and by the latter half of the century, novels.

Richard Beale Davis noted that with the publication of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* in 1740 and the novels of Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Laurence Sterne, "as well as the deluge of imitations. . . the matter and degree of recreational reading changed markedly, and in no place more than in the later eighteenth-century South."¹¹⁶ Robert Winans noted that in Charles Evans's *American Bibliography*, "ghosts [books listed based on circumstantial evidence of their existence, such as advertisements] of English novels far outnumber those of any other category of book for the late eighteenth century."¹¹⁷ The account books from the *Virginia Gazette*'s book shop in 1751-52 and 1764-65 show the increased interest in recreational reading even in the fragmentary evidence that is left. Newspaper commentaries may have severely censured novel readers (more so in America than in England), but the *Gazette* print shop in Williamsburg continued to advertise novels.¹¹⁸ Even dissenter Samuel

¹¹⁵ Susan Stromei Berg, *Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg Imprints* (New York: Clearwater Publishing Company, Inc., 1986), 7.

¹¹⁶ Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), 119.

¹¹⁷ Robert Winans, "Bibliography and the Cultural Historian: Notes on the Eighteenth-Century Novel," in Joyce, eds. *Printing and Society in Early America*, 176.

¹¹⁸ On censure of novels, Cathy Davidson, "The Life and Times of Charlotte Temple: The Biography of a Book," in *Reading in America*, ed., Davidson, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 164.

Davies recorded reading *The Memoirs of the fortunate (Country) Maid, a Romance* in 1753, although he chastised his congregation for reading romances rather than the Bible.¹¹⁹

Still, however much reading tastes may have changed among the literate in the second half of the eighteenth century, there remains the problem of linking such cultural developments among the elite to the rest of Virginia society. Rhys Isaac has shown the complex interweaving of oral, written, and print culture in Virginia: how literacy conferred legitimacy on gentry authority; how the gentry could not afford to overlook the importance of oral culture on election days and in court sessions; how even the most unlettered in the society, slaves, understood the power of letters in the signed passes that allowed them visit to neighboring plantations. "The effectiveness of the ritual occasions," Isaac explained, "depended on profound continuities between the culture of 'learning' . . . and the folk culture."¹²⁰ Common planters may have believed that learned culture was beyond their purview, but that did not signify its irrelevance in their lives.

Studies on popular culture have demolished assumptions that an inability to read created an unbridgeable chasm between the mental worlds of the educated and the unlettered; literacy studies have disproved beliefs that the skills of reading and writing were always taught together or that the inability to write implied an inability to read.¹²¹ Kenneth

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 122.

¹²⁰ Isaac, "Books and the Social Authority of Learning," 244.

¹²¹ See, for example, David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder* and Carson, Hoffman, and Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests* on the closing of the gap between elite and popular culture. On the European side, Eamon Duffy's *Stripping of the Altars* shows the ways in which English Catholics actively participated in the pre-Reformation Church's rich theology as manifested in liturgical and seasonal rituals, without benefit of reading skills. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

Lockridge's *Literacy in Colonial New England* revealed that while two-thirds of white males in seventeenth-century New England could sign their names, by the mid-eighteenth century almost all men had achieved signature literacy. New England women lagged far behind, however: only one third could sign their names by the late seventeenth century; by the mid-eighteenth century, that number had only climbed to fifty percent. In the South, white men did not attain even two-thirds signature literacy; women's literacy levels always remained lower still. Nevertheless, the inability to write did not always signify an inability to read and this was true particularly for women, for whom writing was not considered a necessary skill.¹²²

In post-revolutionary America, however, women's reading and writing skills assumed a new importance. Female academies, most notably the Philadelphia Young Ladies Academy founded in 1787, arose to meet the challenge of educating young women to take their place in the new republic. Their education would still serve a utilitarian purpose, that is, to be better wives and mothers, but in the 1790s that purpose was embedded in a context of a republican ideology that gave women's work within the home a broader civic cast.¹²³ Noble as this aim may have been, it did not meet with universal approbation. Critics still feared that an educated woman would disgust men, even if they began to accept the argument for women's rationality. Education invariably cast out all maternal and domestic tendencies, they were certain. And an increased emphasis on reading at precisely this moment in American history when American writers began to produce their own novels was too

¹²² Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England*, 72-101.

¹²³ Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic*; Nancy Woloch, "The Eighteenth Century: The Eve of Modernity" in *Women and the American Experience* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1984).

dangerous an indulgence to be fostered. For, as Cathy Davidson pointed out, a society's formal education program is designed to promote its own values but many Americans – including women- were not prepared to be so educated and so looked beyond the prescribed reading. In Hannah Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), for example, women readers saw themselves, talking to one another, confiding, advising, in a narrative that put women at the forefront. While the novel never challenged patriarchy overtly, Davidson explained, in the limited choices available to the heroine and her friends, it did "expose its fundamental injustices."¹²⁴

Women's increasing literacy in the early republic allowed them access to a "republic of letters" in which readers, for the first time, were aware of themselves a part of a national public readership. They read themselves into public conversations about politeness and virtue that "potentially limitless others" were also reading.¹²⁵ Reading Foster's *Coquette* for example, in which the villain was a model of politeness but hardly virtuous, women joined a national dialogue about the importance of individual virtue for the public good. It was a long way from the private direction of the fatherly tones of seventeenth-century English advice manuals.

The Contribution of the Present Work

It was precisely in the conjunction in discussions about virtue, the republic, and women's place within it, that women found the authority to create their own codes of respectable feminine conduct. As the century progressed, both the secular and devotional

¹²⁴ Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, 65, 144.

¹²⁵ Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), xiii.

literature depicted women as ideally suited by reason of their very nature to be models of virtuous behavior. By mid-century the lines between the two kinds of literature had blurred, so that religious works gave women practical lessons in daily living, while secular advice stressed virtue. Religious literature that elaborated upon the sublime –that which raised one’s thoughts to heaven- had been diluted by sentimentalism to the extent that, as Kevin Hayes has explained, the “notion of sublimity began to be applied to anything in art or nature which strongly excited the feelings.”¹²⁶ Emotion then became a necessary prerequisite to faith and to the discovery of truth. Inhabiting a world of sentiment, women were therefore innately endowed with a new authority that religion and even the secular presses acknowledged: they were keepers of truth. Cultivating this aspect of her nature, a well-read woman acquired an education and developed her character. An education founded upon the study of virtue combined with her innate emotion and piety, never made her superior to men; but it licensed her –to a degree unknown before—to construct her own codes of conduct and even to judge which men were worthy of her deference and obedience, without straying outside the boundaries of respectable behavior.

It is in this emphasis on the place of religion in the construction of gender in eighteenth-century Virginia that this study takes a step in a new direction. Absent in Mary Beth Norton’s *Founding Mothers and Fathers* and Kathleen Brown’s *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, religion does not usually appear in studies of southern women before the antebellum period. Daniel Blake Smith discounted it entirely in *Inside the*

¹²⁶ Hayes, *Colonial Women’s Bookshelf*, 50.

Great House.¹²⁷ In her review of Kerber's *Women of the Republic* Elizabeth Fox-Genovese wrote that a "secular political ideology advanced by the republican generation precariously straddled a brief moment between two intensely religious periods."¹²⁸ What the present study shows, however, is that religion's influence was not confined to the revival periods. Instead, in the subtle blending of secular and religious discussions of virtue and the overlay of sentiment, religion, and truth, women by the late colonial period found the authority to formulate their own constructions of what it meant to be female, and even (a few) to write their own advice.

The sources for this project are fragmented and scattered. The painstaking process of recovering women's thoughts only begins with collections of their papers; more often than not, it is necessary to pour through collections of family papers categorized by the names of their male relatives. Reading through men's letters to one another, for example, provides glimpses of family life in which women figure. Searching through accounts, it is possible to discover something of the texture of their lives: do they buy books, ribbons, or sugar with their spare cash? Court records add to the picture: inventories tease with the notation of a "small parcel of books;" a few obligingly list the titles. Wills reveal women's control over property real and personal (or lack of it). Suits in chancery courts allow women's voices to be heard in family disputes over property or in petitions that reveal both women's profound vulnerability before the law and their firm appropriation of what protections it afforded.

Piecing these fragments together is not unlike solving a jigsaw puzzle: each piece examined for its colors, content, and shape; tried against others to determine where it may fit;

¹²⁷ Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 68.

placed in one context, or held aside as an intriguing example that must occupy a place all on its own. With so few direct references to reading in the archival sources, it becomes necessary to learn to read behavior, posture, tone of voice, indeed, to learn to read between the lines. Such a reading profits from the example of Rhys Isaac's anthropological perspective of eighteenth-century Virginia; of Richard D. Brown's analysis of the influence of women's reading in the early republic; of David D. Hall's exemplary work on print culture in early America.

The challenge posed to this project by the fragmentary nature of the sources is compounded by the apparent paradoxes of eighteenth-century women's lives in England and in colonial America. How did English women accommodate their second-class status, even as they published prolifically? Why did the *Virginia Gazette* publish both *A Lady's Complaint* against the patriarchal order and essays on the necessity for female subordination? How could Virginian Elizabeth Randolph be the model of womanly submissiveness when she spurned the company of deists Thomas Jefferson and George Wythe when they visited her home? Why did Ann Burwell refuse to vacate the property her father needed to sell, as executor of her husband's will? Why did respectable Virginia women pointedly ignore the prohibitions against reading novels?

Any attempt to answer these questions must be placed in context. Historians of eighteenth-century England have led the way in describing the forms in which patriarchy has persisted, adapting to the challenges it faced. The stringent prescriptive literature of the seventeenth century underwent successive reprintings, substantially unchanged, as women in the eighteenth century increasingly crossed the very boundaries it sought to define. This

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, review of *Women of the Republic* by Linda K. Kerber, *Journal of American History* 68 (June 1981), 120.

study joins the conversation in progress on the British side to explain the importation, dissemination, and adaptation of English ideas about gender in Virginia. As this project explores what it meant to be female in the eighteenth-century south, it goes to the very heart of all that southern women heard and read and learned about themselves, their nature, their work, the Divine intention for them, and how they processed that information. In doing so, it rests on the shoulders of the work of historians of gender, print culture, and British culture, as it asserts the signal importance of religion and advice literature in eighteenth-century constructions of femininity in Anglo-America.

Postscript

One of the great joys of working in the colonial period in Williamsburg, Virginia is the richness not only of archival resources but of eighteenth-century culture that has been reproduced here. Colonial Williamsburg offers an instant retreat into that century in its reconstruction of the colonial capital. Taking their cue from their surroundings, talented students at the College of William and Mary occasionally perform plays from the eighteenth century. After the years I have spent immersed in eighteenth-century letters, manuscripts, advice books, and newspapers, I looked forward to seeing the eighteenth century from a different perspective: a performance of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. Originally produced in London in 1728, it played for one hundred seasons to enthusiastic audiences. It was produced in Williamsburg in 1752 and George Washington is reputed to have loved it. My program notes described the play as "a wickedly funny criticism of all aspects of 18th Century British life, as seen from its lowest rung. . . [turning] all orthodox values upside down in art, commerce, government, and religion."

The Beggar's Opera played to an appreciative twentieth-century audience that night. Directed to perform the play the way eighteenth-century actors would (seeking applause after every song, for instance), the student actors drew from us the responses of an eighteenth-century audience. The whirl of colorful costumes, the raucous songs, the bawdy comedy, and the constant flow of energy between actors and spectators enthralled the audience. Yet I was appalled at the play's misogyny (not a single admirable woman, even by eighteenth-century standards), which went completely unremarked in the program notes. I then applied to a higher source: John Brewer's *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*. There I found plenty about the male characters and its political and social satire, but nothing about Gay's treatment of women, which was most emphatically not satirical.¹²⁹

Given the play's enormous popularity (which can certainly be deduced from its longevity, if nothing else), one must assume that the play's view of women meshed with that of the general populace. Brewer's observation that the play/ballad opera drew from both elite and popular culture, drawing audiences from all ranks of people, only reinforces the point.¹³⁰ Listening to the laughter of the twentieth-century audience, I wondered how eighteenth-century women responded to the humor, so much of which was at their expense. Did they laugh at these jokes? If so, was it because they thought them funny or because they were expected to? Or perhaps they did not notice the caricatures of feminine behavior, much less the sting of the humor? And I realized that in spite of all my scholarly reading, writing, and thinking on the subject of the construction of gender in the eighteenth-century South, I was

¹²⁹ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997), 370-72, 441-49.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 371-72.

not fully prepared for this unexpected plunge into the misogynistic world of the popular culture of the eighteenth century.

I attended the play with a bright, well-educated, professional female friend. She commented upon the colorful staging of the production and the bawdy language, and appeared not to have noticed at all the play's view of its female characters. Two white, middle-class, single, educated, professional women viewed the same play and experienced it in two very different ways. Could that not have been true of women of the same social and economic status in the audience two hundred years ago? How can we really know how women internalized -or resisted- contemporary views of female nature? It is a sobering thought for an historian who has read the advice literature they read, as well as their words and behavior, and presumes to venture to say what it all meant.

CHAPTER II

“TO BE A DUTIFUL AND OBEDIANT WIFE”:

TRADITIONAL ADVICE IN ENGLAND AND THE EARLY AMERICAN SOUTH

In 1770, Mary Ambler traveled to Baltimore from Fauquier County, Virginia, with her two children to be inoculated against the smallpox. She recorded her experiences in a diary, and perhaps with a sense of gratitude for the successful outcome of their brush with the pox, she copied there words she hoped would guide the days of her daughter's life that lay ahead. “From Mr Fordyce's Sermons to Young Women,” she inscribed the passage, “this Paragraph is transcribed for the use of the Copist & She begs her Daugr to observe it well all her Life.”

If to Your natural softness You join that christian meekness, which I now preach; both together will not fail, with the assistance of proper reflection and friendly advice, to accomplish you in the best and truest kind of breeding. You will not be in danger of putting your-selves forward in company, of contradicting bluntly, of asserting positively, of debating obstinately, of affecting a superiority to any present. . . or of neglecting what is advanced by others, or of interrupting them without necessity.¹

This excerpt from the Reverend James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* is as apt an example as any of the eighteenth-century Anglo-American view of womanhood that drew from natural science, theology, and manners to construct an image of what was properly female. Calling upon the Christian virtue of meekness and applying it to the softness with which women were endowed by nature, prescriptive writing for women by

¹ Diary of M. Ambler, 1770. *Virginia Historical Magazine* 45 (April 1937), 170.

the latter half of the eighteenth century combined elements of religion and social prescription so that readers could not tell where religious advice left off and secular counsel began. Even so, it is clear that even in the latter half of the century, religion –that is, Western Christianity- continued to exert influence over the way women were taught what it meant to be female. This chapter examines the content of advice literature for women circulating in the eighteenth century and the contexts in which it was written.

It is impossible to understand ideas about gender and the weight of centuries of tradition in the eighteenth-century Anglo-Atlantic world without a consideration of the most relevant Biblical passages and the ways in which Christian theologians interpreted them throughout the centuries. In the book of Genesis, literally the beginning, we find the definitions of male, female, and gender relations that permeated religious prescriptive writings on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that these definitions undergirded the entire social order.

The best word to describe that social order is "patriarchal." Long understood to refer to an order in which the male head of household held absolute legal and economic authority over dependent males and females, the term was expanded by Gerda Lerner to mean "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to that power."² This order, formed in the third millenium B.C.E., continues to be a presence in the world today. Christian

² Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 239.

interpretations of the ancient Hebrew stories of the creation of men and women and the Fall, and the sin and expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, are largely responsible for its continued strength in Western culture.

There are actually two creation stories in Genesis: the earlier version, credited to author "J," in which God created Eve from Adam's rib, and the later, written several centuries later by "P," in which male and female were created simultaneously. In the earlier version, God created Adam from dust, then put him into a deep sleep, extracted a rib, and created a woman to be his companion. The later version, however, reads, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."³ As Clare Drury has pointed out, there was no sense of female subjugation or distinction in status in the latter passage; instead, "the significance of the gender difference is made clear immediately with the injunction [that follows in the next verse], 'Be fruitful and multiply,'" that is, men and women are different for purposes of procreation.⁴ Both men and women are understood to have been created in the image of God.

Christian writers have tended to conflate the two stories, however; the latter represents the state of perfection humanity knew before the Fall. The earlier story, which includes the Fall, provided the "proof" of divine sanction of the subordination of women as punishment for her sin. It showed how woman was created after and for man; it is

³ Genesis 1:27

⁴ Clare Drury, "Christianity" in Jean Holm, ed., *Women in Religion* (New York: Pinter Publishers, 1994), 33. The earlier story dates to approximately 900 BCE; the later about 400 BCE.

significant that man was given the power to name her as he had named all the other creatures who inhabited the earth.⁵ When Adam and Eve encountered the serpent in the garden, it was Eve who led Adam astray: "when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate."⁶ The writer of the first letter to Timothy in the first century CE crafted an interpretation of this passage that has resonated with male Christian theologians in the centuries since, "For Adam was formed first then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."⁷

Tertullian, a North African convert to Christianity in the late second century, took the story of the Fall to warn his "sisters in Christ" that they "are the devil's gateway. . .you are she who persuaded him whom the devil did not dare attack. . . Do you not know that every one of you is an Eve? The sentence of God on your sex lives on in this age; the guilt, of necessity, lives on too."⁸ Attempting to reconcile both stories in the fourth century, Augustine of Hippo explained that "the woman together with her husband is the

⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁶ Gen 3:6.

⁷ 1 Tim. 2:13-14. Although this epistle is frequently attributed to St. Paul, biblical scholars have shown that it was written about sixty years after Paul's death. By the time this epistle was written, the Church was coping with fears of sexual excesses in the late Roman empire; women were consciously linked with Eve, offering by their beauty temptations of "the forbidden fruit of sex." Karen Armstrong, *The Gospel according to Woman* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1986), 60-61.

⁸ Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, quoted in Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 63.

image of God, so the whole substance is one image. But when she is assigned as a help-meet, a function that pertains to her alone, then she is not the image of God."

Following the writer of the epistle to Timothy, Augustine believed that Eve was more easily tempted, and therefore, it was she who was "the frailer part of society."⁹ Thomas Aquinas, a leading medieval theologian, believed that women's sole purpose was procreation. Greatly influenced by Aristotle, whose work he attempted to incorporate into Christian theology, Aquinas believed men were the more rational and superior of God's creatures. He urged children to follow the example of their fathers since "The father is more to be loved than the mother because he is the active generative element, whereas the mother is the more passive."¹⁰

While Protestant reformers thought of women in somewhat more positive terms, elevating marriage and motherhood over the celibate state, for example, John Calvin could still write, "the woman also, though in the second degree, was created in the image of God." Although Calvin believed that "Adam was taught to recognise himself in his wife, as in a mirror . . . Eve, in her turn, [was] to submit herself willingly to her husband, as being taken out of him."¹¹ While Martin Luther incorporated the later Genesis story to support his assertion that Eve herself was not inferior to Adam, in punishment for her sin, her descendants were relegated to "stay at home and look after the affairs of the

⁹ Augustine, *de Trinitate*, quoted in Drury, "Christianity," 36.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, quoted in Drury, "Christianity," 36.

¹¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries*, quoted in Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 183.

household as one who has been deprived of the ability of administering those affairs that are outside and concern the state."¹²

Of course, Christian theologians did not create patriarchy. Gerda Lerner has shown that the system of male hegemony took nearly twenty-five hundred years to complete, beginning with the development of agriculture in the Neolithic period, during which women were "exchanged" both to cement alliances and to produce children to work the fields. The commodification of female sexuality and male control over female labor became landmarks of civilization with the rise of agricultural societies, urban areas, and city and nation states.¹³

Ancient philosophers such as Aristotle strengthened this already-established hierarchy with an elaborate system of thought that saw males as the teleos of perfection. Sex existed solely for procreation. The male represented the efficient cause, the female the material, that is, the male supplied the sensitive soul, without which the body was no better than a corpse; the female supplied the corruptible body. The second-century physician, Galen of Pergamum, believed both a man and a woman contributed "seed" to produce a child; if each partner produced strong seed, they would create a boy; weak seed resulted in a girl. Always, however, Galen assumed that to be female meant to have weaker seed, not as an empirical matter but as a logical one.¹⁴

¹²Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, quoted in Drury, "Christianity," 39.

¹³Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, passim.

¹⁴Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 28-30, 40. See also Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), especially chapter 4, "The Body, Medicine and Sexual Difference," 42-57. Hitchcock agrees with Laqueur's analysis

These arguments show how contemporary cultural perceptions directly influenced ideas about anatomy. Notions about the generation of heat necessary for conception, for example, were not provable by recourse to the senses. But they were believed because they were logical. In this instance, heat, seen as the source of strength, was present in a greater degree in men than in women. These theories conformed to what men "knew" about male and female bodies.

The greatest teachers of both Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions incorporated the thought of the ancients into the revealed truths of Scripture. Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, for example, was the result of his life's work to apply Aristotelian principles to interpreting Scripture. This combination of reason, "science," and revelation gave new strength to centuries-old ideas about sex and gender.

Perhaps no phrase unites such disparate worlds as the ancient and early modern as William Tyndale's "the weaker vessel," in his 1526 translation of the New Testament.¹⁵ Carried into proverbs, sermons, the King James Bible, and advice literature, this phrase links pre-Christian ideas of the body with Christian theology. Weaker in body, intellect, and character because of their lesser heat, women were passive vessels in their divinely-ordained function of child-bearing. The enduring usage of this term into the eighteenth century, with all of its attendant meanings, testifies to its power and appeal, for by mid-century ancient ideas about male and female anatomy were changing.

regarding science as a cultural construct, but sees medical tracts more as reflective, than as agents of social change.

¹⁵ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 60.

From the time of Aristotle until well into the seventeenth century, the prevailing model of human anatomy was the "one-sex" model.¹⁶ Men and women, it was believed, were of the same sex, arranged along a continuum of heat, with men, as the teleos of perfection, at its axis. Men and women possessed the same genitals; the only difference was that men's were external, while women's were inverted. Sharing the same sex, men and women were separated only by degree; women were distinguished by their frailty, coldness, and inferiority, men by their strength, heat, and superiority.

Such a model necessarily encompassed some elasticity: to be a man or a woman was to hold a social rank, a place in society, or to assume a cultural role; it was not necessarily organically determined. It was possible, for example, to believe in the fifteenth-century the story of a French woman who turned into a man after leaping across a ditch. That she had generated enough heat in her exertions to become perfected, to become male, was eminently plausible. It was because of this very elasticity that it was also important to maintain strict boundaries of gender, which is why punishment for breaking sumptuary laws could be quite severe.¹⁷

This view did not change despite the studies of Renaissance anatomists, whose dissections of male and female cadavers only proved what they already knew: the more

¹⁶ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 1-10. My understanding of gender relies heavily upon Laqueur's persuasive book.

¹⁷ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 8, 126-27. See also Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 75-104, and Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 183-206 on the Thomas/ina Hall story of cross-dressing and its penalties in seventeenth-century Virginia.

they looked, they more they were convinced that a female body was merely a version of a man's. Their very language (or absence of it) proves the point: it was not until the nineteenth century that the ovary acquired a name.¹⁸

"Sometime in the eighteenth century," historian Thomas Laqueur believes, "sex as we know it was invented." For the first time it was possible to speak of the "opposite sex," as scientists discovered and named women's organs, noticed the differences in male and female skeletons, and understood sex and gender in new ways. Biology now bore the weight of understandings of gender; in the enlightened eighteenth century, when all things could be explained, what mattered most was "the immovable foundation of physical fact: sex."¹⁹ Sex and nature, rather than gender, justified the ordering of social relations. Ideas about women's incapacities remained; what was different was the empirical foundation that upheld them. No longer reliant upon the thought of the ancients, the modern world of eighteenth-century science discovered an immutable ground for its social order that, in Anthony Fletcher's apt phrase, "was entirely consonant with the central theological tenets of women's inferiority."²⁰

It is difficult to say which argument, the scientific or the religious, carried the greater weight for women, but surely it was hard, if not impossible, to fly in the face of the cumulative wisdom of the ages. In addition to the androcentric bias of Scripture, devotional readers such as those written by Anglican divine Richard Allestree further

¹⁸ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 70, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 149-51.

²⁰ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, 61.

emphasized women's subordinate place within the natural order. Allestree's *Whole Duty of Man*, which went through sixty-four editions between 1659 and 1842, was probably one of the most influential of these books in England and the American colonies.²¹

He devoted particular attention to women readers with his advice regarding love and marriage. Love, Allestree explained, was "that special end of the woman's creation, the being a help to her husband, Gen. ii.18." Within marriage, the wife owed her husband obedience, commanded "by the apostle [Paul], Col. iii.18, Wives submit yourselves to your own Husbands, as it is fit in the Lord." This admonition, of course, gave women permission to disobey any spousal command that ran counter to the Lord's, but lest wives resort to this dispensation too often, Allestree reminded his readers that "this precept is of force, and will serve to condemn the peevish stubbornness of many wives who resist the lawful commands of their husband, only because they are impatient of this duty of subjection, which God himself requires of them." Neither could wives plead that the bad behavior of their husbands forced their disobedience: "[no] Faults, or provocations of the Husband, can justify their frowardness," Allestree asserted of English wives. The best way to win his approbation was with "gentleness and sweetness." Indeed, Allestree pushed his point further, admonishing wives not to let their anger at their husbands be the occasion of their mates' sinking into sin. "How many men are there that, to avoid the noise of a froward wife, have fallen to company-keeping, and by that to drunkenness,

²¹ Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998), 22. Chapter 3 treats in greater detail the publication and dissemination data of this and other advice books.

poverty, and a multitude of mischiefs? Let all wives therefore beware of administering that temptation," he warned, with finger-jabbing emphasis.²²

The Lady's Calling in Two Parts first appeared in 1673; although published anonymously, its authority was established on the title page: "by the Author of the Whole Duty of Man." The first part of the work delineates feminine virtues and attributes, frequently with a comparison to the masculine. For example, Allestree enjoined meekness upon both men and women as a Christian virtue, but he believed that it was particularly enjoined upon women as a "peculiar accomplishment of their Sex."²³

The most indispensable trait for a woman, however, was modesty. Modesty should be apparent in the face, in a woman's look, in her manner, all of which should point to a "humble distrust of herself; she is to look upon herself as but a novice, a probationer in the world." Without it she not only forfeited her womanhood, she lowered herself to the level of a brute - "nay," he says; she is worse. Such women are beneath the brutes themselves, "as an acquired vileness is below a native."²⁴

This was rather strong language for women whose demeanor did not quite measure up and indeed, the term 'modesty' comprehended much more. Seventeenth-century sensibilities equated modesty with chastity; it referred not only to "the grosser act of incontinency, but to all those misbehaviours, which either discover or may create an inclination to it." The smallest misstep could lead to disastrous consequences and the

²²[Allestree], *Whole Duty of Man* (1842 edition), 259, 260, 261.

²³[Allestree], *The Ladies Calling In Two Parts* by the Author of the *Whole Duty of Man* 5th edition. (London: At the Theatre in Oxford, 1677), 33.

²⁴[Allestree], *The Ladies Calling*, quoted in Angeline Goreau, *The Whole Duty of a Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Garden City, N. Y.: Dial Press, 1985), 43, 44.

vigilant young woman guarded herself against "every indecent curiosity, or impure fancy." A bold, impudent woman who disregarded such warnings was "as a kind of monster, a thing diverted and distorted from its proper form," a monster, who having rejected her very femaleness, was unclassifiable.²⁵

Of course, the insistence upon a woman's chastity was critical to ensure their children were the offspring of their husbands, and not "branches from the wrong stock."²⁶ A bride brought her virginity to her marriage bed as part of the dowry transaction; her fidelity after marriage was crucial as well. Any deviation from this standard spelled disaster for the alliances contracted between wealthy English families; the standard was no less important for the lower rungs of the economic ladder. Angeline Goreau explains that although modesty "had its roots in concrete circumstance, it was interpreted by contemporaries in an abstract, or symbolic, fashion, and then reapplied to the circumstances of everyday life--thus enlarging its sphere of influence to cover the whole experience."²⁷ With sexual significance thus firmly attached to "modesty," it was no wonder that the conduct manuals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries devoted such meticulous care to every aspect of womanly demeanor, manner, speech, dress, and behavior and that any deviant from the standard would be labeled a monster.

Other feminine virtues that derived from womanly modesty were piety and devotion, to which women were "somewhat more of a predisposition towards it in their native temper" than men; affability and courtesie, "which as it is amiable in all, so it is

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, quoted in Angeline Goreau, *The Whole Duty of Woman*, 9.

²⁷Goreau, *Whole Duty of Woman*, 10.

singularly so in women of Quality, and more universally necessary in them than in the other Sex;" and compassion because "the female Sex, being of a softer mold, is more pliant and yielding to the impressions of pity." Patience and obedience, ubiquitous themes in women's advice literature, are prominent in Allestree's work as well, particularly with reference to wifely duties. These virtues (with the exception of obedience) were desirable for men to cultivate also, but the sense of any imperative for men was decidedly missing. To grow in affability and courtesy, for example, was more important for women than men, since men had occasions for "sternness and authority" that women did not.²⁸

The Ladies Calling was enormously influential, riding the wave of popularity set in motion by *The Whole Duty of Man*. Four years after its initial printing it was in its fifth edition; whole sections of it were integrated (plagiarized would be a better word) into a hack work, *The Whole Duty of Woman* and into the more respectable *The Ladies Library*, both of which were popular in the American colonies as well.²⁹ How is such acclaim to be explained?

²⁸[Allestree], *The Ladies Calling* (1677 edition), 88, 71, 53.

²⁹Between 1701 and 1800, there was an edition of *The Whole Duty of Man* printed in England in each of fifty-six years. In sixteen of those years, two or three editions were printed. *Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue*. On its presence in the thirteen American colonies, see Kevin Hayes, *A Colonial Woman's Bookshelf* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 44, 61; Julia Cherry Spruill, "Southern Lady's Library," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 34 (1935), 23; George K. Smart, "Private Libraries," *American Literature* 10 (1938), 45; Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), vol. 2, 502-72, 580; Davis, *Colonial Southern Bookshelf* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 68, 74. Davis notes that *Whole Duty* was found in dissenting as well as Anglican households. That whole sections of *Whole Duty of Man* and *The Ladies Calling* were plagiarized suggests a thriving market for conduct books from which publishers were happy to profit. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 22.

The message of the centrality of patriarchal authority in the works of Allestree and others fell on fertile soil in post-Interregnum England. After the tumult of the Civil War and Cromwell's rule, the Restoration of Charles II promised more than the restoration of a monarchy. The return of the Stuarts promised an order, comfortably familiar, articulated by Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* that linked Adam's rule of his family to the king's rule of his nation. Although women writers of this period followed the example of women writers of the Commonwealth by continuing to publish, the most outspoken of them, Aphra Behn and Mary Astell, remained staunchly royalist and traditional in their thinking about gender roles. Free from the corrupting influence of trade and greed that appeared to morally bankrupt an emerging middle class (and allow social mobility for men while excluding women), Janet Todd explained, royalist women writers preferred "the old hierarchical order [which] seemed more amenable to women, however much it accepted their subordination, while a sense of class could to some extent compensate for the disadvantage of gender."³⁰ Allestree's view of gender relations also supported this order.

But while the Restoration brought stability to government, it also brought a revulsion against the libertine, extravagant behavior of the courtiers of Charles II. Unlike Behn and Astell who preferred the genteel manners of the old order, clerics and members of the increasingly more numerous and influential middling sort blasted the vice of English aristocrats who idled away their time in useless, if not degenerate, lives. Indeed, the private lives of the high born, particularly Charles II himself, were subject to critical scrutiny as it became clear that while the institution of the monarchy was above reproach, the king's personal behavior was not. If the king could not set the example for righteous

³⁰Todd, *The Sign of Angelica*, 16.

fatherhood, family patriarchs in the kingdoms of their homes certainly could, using *Whole Duty of Man* as their guide. Dissenters joined the cry for moral reform, charging, as did Presbyterian Samuel Wright in 1715, that “Men of the highest Condition and Fashion in the World” harbored the same vices as the vicious. Daniel Defoe’s *Conjugal Lewdness* accused both men and women of prostitution, who used their position and sexuality, respectively, for political or economic gain.³¹

It was with this view of profligate gentry that George Savile, Lord Halifax (himself an aristocrat) wrote *The Lady’s New Year’s Gift; or, Advice to Daughter*, the second most widely read advice tract from the late seventeenth century. Fearing the corrupting influence of degenerate men preying upon innocent and naïve young women (such as his daughter), he wrote the tract to equip his daughter to detect and rebuff such cads. First published in 1688, its intimate father-to-daughter tone made surrogate daughters of his readers and gave his words the strength of parental authority. So successful was this tack, Halifax’s letter was reprinted in England throughout the eighteenth century, enjoyed a wide readership in the American colonies, and crossed the Channel for four editions in French and one in Italian.³²

Halifax’s work differed from Allestree’s in content as well as tone and style. Although religion was the first topic Halifax addressed, he dispensed with it in relatively short order, devoting only six of eighty-four pages to the subject.³³ He believed that

³¹ Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 198-201.

³² John P. Kenyon, ed., *Halifax Complete Works* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), 270. The French translations appeared in 1692, 1748, 1752, and 1757; the Italian in 1734.

³³ Lord Halifax, *The Lady’s New Year’s Gift; or, Advice to a Daughter* (London, 1700), 3-9.

religion should "be the chief object of your thoughts" and "the only thing necessary," and urged his daughter to reject what he called the "tales of witches, hobgoblins, prophecies and miracles" that distracted the hearer from the discovery of religion's real truths. He admonished her to continue in the Anglican faith in which she was raised because "it is the best in itself," but also because it saved intellectually taxing inquiry into others: "in respect that the voluminous inquiries into the truth, by reading, are less expected from you [a female]."³⁴ With that, he left the subject to proceed to more practical concerns of husband, family, behavior and conversation, and friendship.

Although he somewhat sympathetically owned it a disadvantage to women that they were seldom allowed to choose their husbands, he quickly revealed his thinking about the relative merits of men and women. "You must first lay it down for a foundation in general [that is to say, you must first take it for granted]" he began, "that there is inequality in the sexes, and that for the better economy of the world the men, who were to be the lawgivers, had the larger share of reason bestowed upon them." This, he believed, justified women's "compliance that is necessary for the better performance of those duties which seem to be most properly assigned to it."³⁵ Halifax's reliance on religious or scientific arguments for his position was ambiguous; whether God or nature bestowed the larger share of reason upon men, he did not specify; nor did it much matter. He rested confidently in the assumption of male superiority as a universally acknowledged truth.

³⁴Kenyon, ed., *Halifax: Complete Works*, 272, 274, 275, 276.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 277.

Yet Halifax was well aware of the double standard that existed in Restoration England. While admitting that the "laws of marriage run in a harsher style towards your sex," his purpose was to show his daughter how to make the best of things. Since law and custom were not going to change, her best bet was to be forewarned; alerted to the perils that beset English marriages, she would know how to "cure your husband's mistakes and to prevent your own."³⁶

The primary hazard to marital bliss was infidelity. Again while admitting that what was seen "in the utmost criminal degree" if committed by women, "passeth under a much gentler censure" for men, he nonetheless urged her to turn a blind eye to her husband's indiscretions. A man of sense would recognize his folly and "reclaim himself," he assured her; if not, a wife's reproaches would only serve to provoke and not reform him. Indeed, "such an indecent complaint," Halifax argued, "makes a wife more ridiculous than the injury that provoketh it." The best way to handle such situations was with "discretion and silence" which he believed would be the "most prevailing reproof."³⁷

Deprived of any legal identity, much less legal recourse, within marriage, a wife had to take to the moral high ground, relying on the virtuous influence of her example. If that failed to produce the desired result, she must at least maintain her dignity - in silence, of course. Her husband's failings could have their bright side, however. For example, a husband who was overly fond of wine would fail to notice housewifely lapses, as his drunkenness "will throw a veil over your mistakes, and will set out and improve everything you do that he is pleased with." A weak husband was a perfect foil to his wife

³⁶Ibid., 278, 279.

³⁷Ibid., 279, 280.

since she will "make the better figure for her husband's making no great one." A smart wife could get around a witless husband by "do[ing] like a wise minister to any easy prince; first give him the orders you afterwards receive from him." A faultless husband would be more of a nuisance anyway, since he "hath an eye so piercing" that everything would be "exposed to his full censure."³⁸ Halifax moved in the highest circles of the Restoration court; he saw everything. Knowing full well the inequities of both law and custom, the best he could do was advise his daughter how to put the best face on her situation. Women were not without power, he was suggesting, if they but knew how to use it.

Besides, Halifax concluded, the whole point of the very substantial differences between men and women was that the sexes complement one another. "We are made of such different tempers, that our Defects may be the better mutually supplied," he explained soothingly, "your sex wanteth our reason for your conduct and our strength for your protection; ours wanteth your gentleness to soften and entertain us." Thus it was that women were entrusted with the government of the household, ruling the nursery in such a way that the children will "be more in awe of your kindness than of your power."³⁹ The wise wife exercised her power over recalcitrant husband or children in velvet gloves. None were aware of the wife's directing influence. Instead, they were so gently led that they knew not the hands that guided them.

As Allestree had before him, Halifax saw a woman's behavior as indistinguishable from her modesty. Leading his reader from her life in the home out to the world was a

³⁸Ibid., 281, 285, 286, 281.

³⁹Ibid., 277-78; 291.

"dangerous step" for virtue alone could not protect an innocent. "A close behaviour is the fittest to receive virtue for its constant guest, because there, and there only, it can be secure." Men watched for women who pressed against the limits that the law and custom permitted, knowing they were "so very near to going farther."⁴⁰ The strictest vigilance was required therefore, even within allowable parameters, so that a woman's behavior would never betray the slightest reason to suspect her virtue.

It could be a bit tricky to walk a line that intimated neither forwardness nor rudeness. In an impossibly vague prescription, Halifax warned Elizabeth and his other "daughters" to avoid "looks that forbid without rudeness and oblige without invitation." It was crucial that a woman not be overly loud in her conversation, nor laugh boisterously, nor display any learning, yet neither was she to affect shyness. She must acknowledge a man's superiority of judgment, yet not be so led by a "compliance which may betray you into irrecoverable mistakes . . . [that] hath led your sex into more blame than all other things put together."⁴¹

Courtship, of course, was fraught with opportunities for irrecoverable mistakes; "it is as safe to play with fire as to dally with gallantry," Halifax warned. And it was the easiest thing, indeed the most usual thing, "for a woman to conspire against herself" by thinking that she could control its pace. Initial resolutions to stop at holding an acquaintance in good esteem falter as "A lady is apt to think a man speaketh so much reason whilst he is commending her." It was all too easy for a woman to mistake the humble posturings of men for love but Halifax knew that "their fair appearance have

⁴⁰Ibid., 295, 296.

⁴¹Ibid., 297.

generally less respect than art in them." The design of the compliment was the object of the effort, rather than the lady herself. The discerning woman could recognize pure flattery when she heard it and a practiced reserve in her behavior was her best guard against it.⁴²

The care a woman exercised in courtship was equally necessary in her choice of friends, for just as her virtue was judged by her demeanor, manners, and deportment, it was judged also by the company she kept. No friends are perfect to be sure, Halifax granted, but at least, he instructed his daughter, "be sure yours may not stray from the rules." The common inclinations implied by association became problematic when a friend fell from innocence. This delicate situation called for scrupulous judgment, so that one neither joined hastily in the censure, nor defended her with suspicious vigor. The danger was that with the "vexation that belongeth to such a mistake you will draw an ill appearance upon yourself." In the end, however, the priority had to be saving one's own reputation, by severing the friendship although "without breaking too roughly."⁴³

Halifax began his *Advice* with an assumption of the inequality of the sexes. That was why a wife must submit to male authority and patiently forebear her husband's faults (if not be grateful for them). Yet it is clear that he also recognized some of the tensions within a patriarchal system, not the least of which was the contrived logic on which it was founded.⁴⁴ He could see that the weaker sex, far from finding protection from his,

⁴²Ibid., 299-300.

⁴³Ibid., 301-302.

⁴⁴See Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996); and Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives Nasty Wenches & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) for a

suffered injustices. He acknowledged the double standard and the problems posed by exceptional women who rose above the level of their sex and therefore were entitled to "a mitigation in their own particular of a sentence which was given generally against womankind."⁴⁵ He also recognized, briefly, that the best he could offer was a way for clever women to use their powers of moral suasion to get around the strictures of law and custom. Even so, with the pragmatism of a court politician who supported the Stuarts until James II himself fled the struggle for the throne, he surveyed the world as he knew it, accepted its immutability, and was satisfied with stating the obvious: "you must take it for a foundation . . . that there is an inequality in the sexes." So he constructed an advice manual that reinforced ideas of female inferiority and the necessity of cultivating a virtuous demeanor of submissiveness, obedience, and deference. It was said, however, that while Elizabeth Savile kept her father's gift on her dressing table, she had something of a shrewish reputation, confirmed perhaps by the comment her husband scrawled across it: "Wasted effort!"⁴⁶

Elizabeth Savile's rejection of her father's advice may not have been an uncommon response to such literature. Women's increasing presence throughout the eighteenth century in playhouses, assemblies, concerts, parks, and print expanded the spaces that respectable women could inhabit. Free to move about in public, conducting salons in which they could display their wit, writing protests against the limitations upon their education, English women did not conform to the prescriptions set for them by

discussion of the theory that underpinned patriarchal society in colonial Virginia and the tensions that arose in the diversions between theory and practice.

⁴⁵Kenyon, ed., *Halifax*, 278.

⁴⁶Kenyon, ed., *Halifax*, 270.

Halifax or Allestree to remain quietly at home.⁴⁷ Nor were such freedoms necessarily the prerogative of wealthy women only: the subtitle of Allestree's *Whole Duty of Man*, after all, was "for the Use of all but Especially the Meanest Reader." The late seventeenth-century social context in which Allestree and Halifax wrote was turbulent with change. Observers from continental Europe remarked upon the social mobility that was possible in England as men from the lower orders took advantage of educational opportunities, advanced in trade, and married their daughters to cash-poor gentlemen.⁴⁸ For a variety of demographic reasons, large numbers of women married late or remained single during this period, giving them motive and opportunity to acquire an education or skill to ensure their financial independence. Hilda Smith has pointed out that this "leisure" in women's lives allowed them time to form friendship circles, from which emerged feminist ideas.⁴⁹ As both Allestree and Halifax surveyed these changes with alarm, they took up their

⁴⁷ See Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 225-29.

⁴⁸ A fifteenth-century Italian wrote that in England he had seen "a man who has given up the trade, bought an expensive estate, and left the town to go there with his family, turn his sons into noblemen, and himself be accepted by the noble class." Poggio Bracciolini, quoted in Lawrence Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 16. On social mobility in early modern England, see also Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 17-38; Lawrence Stone, "Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700," *Past and Present* 33 (1966); R. H. Tawney, "The Rise of the Gentry," in *Social Change and Revolution in England, 1540-1640* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1965) 14; H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The Decline of the Mere Gentry," in *ibid.*; J. H. Hexter, "The Military Decline of the Aristocracy," in *ibid.*, 37-38. Although the latter three historians disagree about the source of the new wealth, all agree on the principle of a 'rise,' hence mobility. On literacy and social mobility, see David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order, Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁴⁹ Hilda Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 19-29.

pens to address both the lower orders and the aristocracy with the same message, designed to ensure the preservation of the patriarchal order.

Further complicating the issue in the eighteenth century, Linda Colley has pointed out, were aggressive English men, property-owners although landless (which description could fit many women as well), who by the 1780s were campaigning for universal manhood suffrage. "How were [these men] to legitimise their claim to active citizenship," Colley asked, "without taking women along with them?"⁵⁰ Elite writers responded to these challenges to male authority the only way they could: by defining even more rigidly the physical, mental, and emotional differences between men and women. Women were increasingly excluded from any participation in the political sphere. For example, the gallery in the House of Commons was closed to women spectators in 1778 and six years later, Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, was pilloried for her public campaign to support the candidacy of Charles James Fox for Parliament.⁵¹ Women's political activity, *The Lady's Magazine* believed, was "as unbecoming as to hear one of us [men] declaim against the particular cut of ruffles."⁵² Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* taught that women were designed by nature to obey and to accept the home as her province.⁵³

⁵⁰ Colley, *Britons*, 239.

⁵¹ Linda Colley recounts the episode in *Britons*, 242-50. See also Amanda Foreman, "A Politician's Politician: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and the Whig party" in Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, eds., *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations, and Responsibilities* (London: Longman, 1997), 179-204.

⁵² Quoted in *ibid.*, 249.

⁵³ Ironically enough, Rousseau's writings could also be used to legitimate women's participation in public affairs in his claim of a connection between public virtue and the family. Hitherto, citizenship had been defined in terms of land ownership and the ability

While prescriptive writers fought to define and defend the borders of political public life from female onslaughts, they did not neglect the “home” front. Elites derived status from how ordered a domestic household they ran, Margaret Hunt has observed; the reflection cast on them by errant wives or daughters may well explain why they bought (or wrote, in Halifax’s case) the advice to ensure women’s compliance to the gender order by which they lived.⁵⁴ This must certainly explain why *Whole Duty of Man*, *The Ladies Calling*, and *The Lady’s New Year’s Gift* went through so many printings unchanged throughout the century. “The very stridency of the opposition [to women’s departure from prescribed behavior],” Colley explained, “demonstrated that in Britain the boundaries supposedly separating men and women were, in fact, unstable *and becoming more so.*”⁵⁵

Urbanization in the eighteenth century abetted the process by which women’s spheres broadened. Cities offered theatres, lending libraries, visiting circuits, and salons to wealthy country women and the hope of employment to poor women. Women’s very visible presence in British urban centers prompted both the trotting out of old material and the generation of new, although some writers adapted their tone and language to meet these challenges to patriarchal authority in less strident ways. For instance, while Dr. John Gregory, a professor of medicine in Edinburgh, told his daughters in 1774 that even

to bear arms to defend the land. Colley, *Britons*, 273-75.

⁵⁴ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 211.

⁵⁵ Colley, *Britons*, 250.

the dreaded state of spinsterhood was to be preferred to living under a fool's "tyranny and caprice." He also urged them, however, to keep any learning "a profound secret."⁵⁶

Reverend James Fordyce was similarly concerned by the encroachment of women into areas previously considered male domains. Fordyce was a minister in the Church of Scotland, originally from Aberdeen and settled London. Although a Presbyterian, he spoke in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) for dissenter and Anglican authorities alike. Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have observed that dissenters and Anglicans had found that they could work in concert for various moral causes, believing that "Christian men emerging from the bosom of their families carry Godliness with them."⁵⁷ Both groups also agreed on the essentials of gender roles, both within and without the boundaries of the home. With respect to agreement on gender roles, it is arguable that détente between the two traditions was reached in the eighteenth century. The comment of High Tory clergyman Richard Polwhele that "the crimsoning blush of modesty, will be always more attractive than the sparkle of confident intelligence," for example, was echoed in Fordyce's admission that for him "The retiring graces have always been the most attractive; I had rather a thousand times see a young lady carry her bashfulness too far, than pique herself on the freedom of her manners." Men of his acquaintance, he continued addressing the same salon culture that had worried John Gregory, "have been usually averse to the thought of marrying a witty female."⁵⁸ The *Sermons* were so

⁵⁶ Dr. John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774; London, 1793), 26.

⁵⁷ Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 74. Davidoff's and Hall's research targets the early nineteenth century, but their findings are suggestive for the eighteenth as well.

⁵⁸ Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females*, quoted in Colley, *Britons*, 253; James

widely read in both England and the colonies and contained such a wealth of advice to young women that they merit a closer look.

Fordyce began by immediately declaring his "unfeigned regard for the Female Sex" and assuring them of his "fervent zeal for best interests of society, on which he believes their dispositions and deportment will ever have a mighty influence."⁵⁹ Indeed, not only women, but the whole of society, would benefit from his advice, for the well-bred woman wielded the scepter of influence over unruly men. While he hoped that "women of most conditions, and at all ages, may meet with some useful counsels . . . should curiosity incite them" to open his books, he recognized that his work would appeal more to "young people in genteel life, to whom they are chiefly addressed."⁶⁰ After long association with the fashionable and gay young people of London, he aimed his discourses above an audience of "vulgar rank." Patently assuming that only women of manners would be interested in his words, therefore, Fordyce cleverly transformed all his readers, even those of lower ranks, into willing gentlewomen. "Persuaded," as he was, "that women of worth and sense are to be found everywhere," Fordyce was confident of both the cogency of his work and of his audience's ability to discern his eminent good

Fordyce, "Sermons for Young Women." *Early American Imprints*. 2nd Series, No. 17522, vol. 1, pp. 53, 97. Margaret Hunt points out that Anglican and dissenter clergy came from trading backgrounds, "were thoroughly immersed in urban business culture," and by their "more expansive education...often including a knowledge of Latin, were in an especially favorable position to mediate between the workday culture of tradesmen and the more genteel culture of their betters." In such ways was James Fordyce situated to speak to young women both genteel and middling. Hunt, *Middling Sort*, 19-20.

⁵⁹ James Fordyce, "Sermons for Young Women," iii.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, iv.

sense.⁶¹ Even before beginning his discursives on the Epistle to Timothy (his ostensible subject), he effortlessly donned the mantle of masculine authority and presumed the assent of like-minded females.

It has taken the work of twentieth-century feminist scholars to point out the difficulties female readers have faced as they approached biblical texts and interpretations. When women approach those most basic of Christian tenets, the Ten Commandments, for example, how do they hear the tenth (not to covet thy neighbor's wife)? Or how do women identify with the story of David's desire for Bathsheba that drove him to the murder of her husband Uriah? In these and countless other texts where the focus is androcentric, female readers must perform some mental gymnastics. They must learn to identify with the masculine experience, to imagine themselves men. As Mary Ann Tolbert explained, "to be a full member of the divinely created universal order, we must pretend we are male and consequently pretend that we are not female."⁶²

It cannot be assumed that these considerations would have occurred to any of James Fordyce's readers; to do so would have required women to literally think *out* of their culture. Thousands of years of Western literary tradition assumed a masculine perspective that was normative and universal, from which the feminine was marginal, if not deviant. Even Mary Wollstonecraft, considered one of the most radical female writers, argued for women's access to education on the ground of its usefulness to the

⁶¹ Ibid., v.

⁶² Mary Ann Tolbert, "Protestant Feminism and the Bible: on the Horns of a Dilemma." In Alice Bach, ed., *The Pleasure of her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International., 1990), 18.

family unit – and she was writing at the *end* of the century.⁶³ Fordyce can be pardoned his presumption of the approval of women "of sense."

But there was the ever-present hurdle of the feminine nature to be overcome if female influence was to be anything other than pernicious. "Does not the apostle Peter expressly style the woman the weaker vessel?" Fordyce asked his readers, echoing the King James Bible.⁶⁴ This scriptural reference undergirded most of Fordyce's anxiety about the inability of women to resist the temptations to corruption with which they were surrounded. But both God and nature provided some bulwark against temptations. "The all-presiding power has graciously taken to show his care of female virtue, not only by impressing the minds of your sex with that deep and lively sense of reputation," Fordyce explained, but also by impressing the minds of men with "so high an esteem for every indication of chastity in women [and] so strong a disapprobation of the contrary," as to enlist the strength of male protection as well.⁶⁵ Nature, too, committed women to the protection of men. "They [women] are timid, and want to be defended. They are frail," Nature says to men, "O do not take advantage of their weakness."⁶⁶

The female nature, inherently endowed with virtue, modesty, and softness, was markedly different from the male that was characterized by strength, courage, and

⁶³ Wollstonecraft condemned education that would make of women "alluring mistresses [rather] than affectionate wives and rational mothers." Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in Carol H. Poston, ed., *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: Mary Wollstonecraft* (1975; reprint New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 7.

⁶⁴ Fordyce, "Sermons for Young Women," vol. 2, 26.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

wisdom. But, Fordyce asked, was this not Nature's intention? "Such difference of sex, which she [Nature] has marked by characters no less distinguishable than those that diversify their outward forms," he explained, merely proved those "mental and moral" differences between men and women. Happy was the marriage in which the couple recognized their differences and where their "wants are mutually supplied." "The fair sex," he continued, "should naturally expect to gain from our conversation, knowledge, wisdom, and sedateness." In exchange, men could expect "humanity, politeness, cheerfulness, taste, and sentiment."⁶⁷

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of these understandings of gender in the eighteenth century. For while men might supply knowledge, wisdom, and counsel to their wives in marriage, those attributes were equally applicable in the much wider contexts of business, trade, and politics. Meanwhile, women were fashioned by God and nature to soften the rough edges of masculine temperaments, to ease life's burdens with a steady cheerfulness, and to earn the approval of all society, but more particularly of the one man to whom she would devote her life. Fordyce's sermons showed women how Scripture delineated their functions in life -to tame and please men, to marry, to raise a family- and how daily work was to be apportioned between husband and wife, all of which were restricted to the context of marriage and home.

Fordyce's young readers were, of course, the descendants of Eve and inherited all the womanly frailties and weaknesses of their biblical mother. Central as was the belief in the inherent weakness of the feminine nature, it was also a springboard for a host of

⁶⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, 88-89.

related traits that were considered peculiarly female. Echoing Allestree, modesty, reserve, virtue, piety, and softness were but a few that Fordyce believed were essential for young women to cultivate to overcome their inherently weaker natures. Having established, by reference to Scripture, the complementary functions of men and women and the female nature's unique vulnerability to temptation, the sermons turned to the practical daily concern of how to avoid lapses in virtue (or even the appearance of a lapse).

Cultivating a virtuous demeanor became crucial to a woman's reputation as the appearance of virtue became indicative of its inherence. A woman's deportment then, of which men were "in general better judges than women," was everything. Fordyce's disgust with a woman who "contracted a certain briskness of air and levity of deportment" was palpable; such behavior was only just barely distinguishable from the "brazen front and bold attack of the prostitute"!⁶⁸

Good grooming was also important. After expressing his contempt for slovenly women who were oblivious to considerations of cleanliness and neatness, he revealed that "we [men] shall be doubly charmed, first with finding young women that are not slaves to show, and next with your putting so much respect on our heads and hearts, as to suppose we are only to be gained by better qualities."⁶⁹ The writer of the First Epistle to Timothy had urged modest dress upon his first-century hearers, but modesty in dress was a tricky subject in wealthier circles of Anglo-America. His admonition to women to

⁶⁸ Ibid., vol.1, pp. 54, 52, 49, 53.

⁶⁹ Ibid., vol. 1, 40.

"adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety" pointed, of course, to a favorite eighteenth-century subject: womanly excesses in dress. Fordyce seemed to strike a moderate tone. "None but the most . . . prejudiced will deny that women may avail themselves of every decent attraction, that can lead to a state for which they are manifestly formed," he believed. But he urged them to remain within their rank and station in life, prescribing vaguely dress of "decency and moderation." After all, they were not to value themselves upon their dress, but upon the "graces of the mind, modesty, meekness, prudence, [and] piety."⁷⁰

The injunction to concentrate on internal ornaments instead of fashionable externals might seem to be a welcome focus on things spiritual rather than temporal - these are sermons, after all. But the point is rather more earthbound: "modest apparell. . . is a powerful attractive to honourable love. . . When you show a sweet solicitude to please by every decent, gentle, unaffected attractions, we are soothed, we are subdued, we yield ourselves willing captives."⁷¹

Whether discussing a woman's grooming, dress, deportment, conversation, reading, Fordyce guided his readers to the ultimate purpose of attending to these many details: the approbation of his sex. "The male heart is a study, in which your sex are supposed to be a good deal conversant," he declared pointedly, "To gain men's affections, women in general are naturally desirous. They need not deny, they cannot conceal it."⁷²

⁷⁰ Fordyce, "Sermons for Young women," vol. 1, 2-3.

⁷¹ Ibid., vol. 1, 27-28.

⁷² Ibid., vol. 1, 40.

If it was true, as Fordyce declared, that the first principle of the "science of domestic happiness" was ease (for the husband, that is, who could not be easy "in the company of a critic"), it was his task to cultivate women who fit his definition of an accomplished woman. "What honour can be enjoyed by your sex, equal to that of showing yourself every way worthy of a virtuous tenderness from ours?" he asked. His admonition to "Acquire a habit of fixed attention [as] a sort of silent flattery truly exquisite" summarized two volumes of advice that for his readers had but one object: matrimony.⁷³ "Does it not seem agreeable to the purposes of Providence that the securing of this [male] attention, and these regards, should be a principal aim?"⁷⁴ Couched in the context of a sermon, based on scriptural and divine imperatives, the power of the message to women could not be ignored: the very goal of her life was to secure the -favorable- attentions of men.

Scripture also provided guidelines for the division of labor between men and women that made for both a smoothly run household and a well-ordered world. Once again, women's responsibilities were grounded in the understandings of the female nature: their "ability to commiserate and comfort, to melt into tears at the sight or hearing of distress, to take the care of children . . . these lovely peculiarities in their temperament" fully suited women to domestic life. Besides, this was the way it had always been. "The care of a household all ages and nations have agreed to consider as an indispensable part of female employment," Fordyce declared, endowing such wisdom

⁷³ Ibid., vol. 1, 97, 17, 125.

⁷⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, 84.

with nature's own immutability that both preceded and transcended Judeo-Christian teachings.⁷⁵

Nature, as the expression of the divine order, also dictated the gendered division of labor. Tying together both the reason of science and revealed religion, Fordyce explained that the male "constitution of mind, no less than the body, is for the most part hardy and rough. By means of both, by the demands of life, and by the impulse of passion, they are engaged in a vast variety of pursuits, from which your sex are precluded by decorum, by softness, and by fear."⁷⁶ In any event, weaker in mind and body, women were excluded from "outdoor affairs," a common eighteenth-century phrase that denoted so simply a complex of centuries of scientific and religious thought.

While decorum and fear might be products of culture and training, softness was a product of biology. "Nature appears to have formed the faculties of your sex for the most part with less vigour than those of ours; observing the same distinction here, as in the more delicate frame of your bodies," Fordyce explained. Delicate bodies could not sustain the strenuous exertions demanded of male activities. Women of sense, then, "will allow that war, commerce, politics, exercises of strength and dexterity, abstract philosophy, and all the abstruser sciences, are most properly the province of men."⁷⁷

Women's "empire" was that of the heart, that which "is secured by meekness and modesty, by soft attraction and virtuous love." Only "masculine" women would want to

⁷⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, 113, 106.

⁷⁶ Ibid., vol. 1, 84.

⁷⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, 137.

share in the interests of men, and those women, he warned his readers, "do not understand your true interests." Not that he believed his readers incapable of the "judicious and the solid," at least "in such proportion as is suited to your destination in life. [But] this . . . does not require reasoning or accuracy, so much as observation and discernment. . . It is not the argumentative but the sentimental talents, which give you that insight, and those openings into the human heart, that lead to your principal ends as Women."⁷⁸ Neither God nor nature intended women to be thinking, reasoning creatures. Indeed, their very emotional instability and (relative) intellectual incapacity precluded them from participation in the public life of the polity. Her softness graced the home; his reason ordered their world and his valor preserved it. God and nature dictated this distinction between male and female; Scripture and English law and custom upheld it. Never were the two to be confounded: an "effeminate fellow" was as much an "object of contempt and aversion" as was a masculine woman.⁷⁹ Dress, carriage, manners, and deportment were as important in this respect as was a recognition of one's place in the government of the family and the polity.

Fordyce wrote a full century after Allestree and the message appears, in one sense, to be tediously repetitive. Yet Fordyce was compelled to supplement the writings of Allestree and Halifax whose works were widely available throughout the eighteenth century. The havoc in social relations wreaked by urbanization simply were not addressed in the earlier works; Fordyce was only one writer in a circuit that included

⁷⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, 138.

⁷⁹ Ibid., vol. 1, 53.

Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Glasgow, cities whose growth, Linda Colley commented, “can be measured by the rate of gloomy pronouncements on the deterioration of female manners.”⁸⁰ Not for Fordyce were the women who displayed their wit and learning in assembly rooms; rather he preferred that women’s socializing be contained at home under the watchful eye of its patriarch. Anxious to rein in the alarming freedoms urban women appeared to enjoy, he sought to keep gender lines rigidly drawn down to the last meticulous detail of appearances.

Yet Fordyce had to temper his message as well; he could not instruct his readers, as Halifax had, to be grateful for a husband’s drunkenness which could work to their benefit. Historians are only beginning to reframe their understanding of patriarchy; rather than assuming its monolithic character, they have, as Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus have observed, “reinterpreted it as both insidious and enduring, appearing in different guises at various times and places.”⁸¹ Times had changed since *The Ladies Calling* and *A New Year’s Gift* were first published. Whether Lawrence Stone is right or wrong in his model of the origins of the affective family, it is clear that by mid-century the ideal of companionate marriage flourished, even within a patriarchal society. So women had to be won, rather than ordered, to their place in the home with appeals to their softness of heart, for instance, that equipped them for the tender responsibilities of motherhood or to their virtuous natures that could reform their wayward men. Marshalling the authorities of scripture and science (not to mention his sex, for these

⁸⁰Colley, *Britons*, 241.

⁸¹Barker and Chalus, *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*, 16. See also Fletcher, *Gender, Sex & Subordination*.

were masculine disciplines), Fordyce's *Sermons* appealed to women to recognize and assume their proper place in the world.⁸²

In his emphasis on manners and deportment, Fordyce's *Sermons* resembled more a reasoned Anglican, than an emotional dissenter's, style of preaching. The religious excesses of the past that had caused so much bloodshed were held in abhorrence; talk of hellfire and damnation seemed out of place in an enlightened age. Instead, Anglican preaching followed the model of seventeenth-century Archbishop John Tillotson: topics in ethics delivered with dispassionate elegance. The church became a "society for the reformation of manners," a polite place in which the word "hell" was never spoken, and through which the social order was both "refined and rationalized."⁸³

The emphasis on reason and the intellect, rather than inflamed religious passions, was, of course, the leitmotif of the age of the enlightenment. In its elegantly rational discourses, the Anglican Church mirrored its time and sought to elaborate upon its middle way: situating authority for faith on the foundation of reason, rather than in the authority of prelates or even completely in Scripture. In its "firm and conscious ties with secular society," James Downey observed, lies the explanation for the popularity of these

⁸²Indeed, by the eighteenth century the efforts begun by seventeenth century feminists in science had largely fallen by the wayside, victim, to women's acceptance of their natures as sentimental rather than rational. Hilda L. Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1982), 60-66.

⁸³Downey, James, *The Eighteenth-Century Pulpit: A Study of the Sermons of Butler, Berkeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitefield, and Wesley*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 1-27.

sermons: reflective of their culture, they translated well from the pulpit to the English popular press.⁸⁴

The sermons of Tillotson and Fordyce, along with Jeremy Taylor's *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Holy Dying* (1650, 1651), Allestree's *Whole Duty of Man*, and Lewis Bayly's *Practice of Piety* (1613), crossed the Atlantic and found a receptive audience in Virginia.⁸⁵ The pages of the popular press, *The Virginia Gazette*, reflected the influence of both English sermons and secular writings about gender ways. Elitist though they may have been in their origination, these ideas found an audience in the lower orders through the medium of the newspaper. The recurrent theme of wifely submission, for example, was as popular in Virginia as in England. One writer decided that the key to a happy marriage (for husbands) was finding a wife who "has no View of Interest different from his, and makes his Joys and Sorrows all her own."⁸⁶ Following the influence of Lord Halifax, the author of an essay on "Matrimonial Felicity" (1737) directed wives "Never dispute with him, whatever be the Occasion; . . . forego the trifling Satisfaction of having your own Will. . . And if any Altercations or Jars happen, don't separate the Bed." Following these instructions, he assured them, "the Animosity will sooner cease." Better still, the women who followed his rules would promote both

⁸⁴ Ibid., 14, 10.

⁸⁵ George K. Smart, "Private Libraries in Colonial Virginia," *American Literature* 10 (1938). Richard Beale Davis referred to the "omnipresence" of the basic elements of any literate southern colonist's library: the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and *The Whole Duty of Man*. Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*, vol. 2, 624.

⁸⁶ *The Virginia Gazette*, 10 February 1737/8, p. 2.

"the Honour of Marriage, and the glory of the Fair Sex."⁸⁷ No rank of woman was exempt from this advice. In 1739 the heartfelt words of King Stanislaus to his daughter who was departing her country to become queen of France appeared on the front page. "You must answer to the King's Hopes . . . by an entire complaisance to his Will; by your natural Sweetness in complying with his desires, and by a Resignation to his Sentiments. Let it be your Will to please, and your Pleasure to obey him."⁸⁸

The essay on "Matrimonial Felicity" is typical in other ways of Halifax's ideas. In spite of his afterthought that his advice might easily be taken by both sexes, the author targeted wives since he assumed that the success of the marriage rested with them. A husband will have his faults; he "is a Man, not an Angel," after all, but the best strategy, was not to "murmur or reflect, which makes the Weight more hard to be born . . . Every Morning put on a Resolution of being good-natur'd, and chearful for the Day." In other words, the wise wife lowered her expectations, bore her disappointments in silence, and wore a brave face. Moreover, a wife was to match her moods to her husband's, not to be "jocund, when you know him full of Business, Care, and Trouble" since such behavior showed a "Disregard of his Affection."⁸⁹

Wifely subordination had its roots in the biblical admonitions of woman's sinful nature, and examples of flawed womanhood abounded in the early years of the *Gazette's* publication. In 1736, one rejected suitor left his 'love' a poem that ended:

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸*The Virginia Gazette*, 6 April 1739, p.1.

⁸⁹*The Virginia Gazette*, 20 May 1737, p. 1.

In Woman, how can Sense and Beauty meet?
 The wisest Men their Youth in Folly spend:
 The best is he, who early knows the Cheat,
 and finds his Error, while there's Time to mend.⁹⁰

"The Ladies," another believed, "are either Man's greatest Comfort, or his greatest Plague."⁹¹ "Reflections on unhappy Marriages," excerpted from the English publication, *The Universal Spectator*, warned garrulous wives that "Love abhors Clamour and soon flies away."⁹² An account taken from the *London Magazine* in 1739 told of a man who tried to hang himself. One bystander supposed that he was a married man, since "nothing could be more likely to make a Man hang himself than Matrimony." A poem following the account bemoaned the curse of love that women have used to deceive men since Adam's time:

Poor *Adam* by his Wife ('tis known)
 Was trick'd some Years ago;
 But *Adam* was not trick'd alone,
 For all his Sons are also.

The moral of the story was revealed in the last stanza:

The Liver of *Prometheus*
 A gnawing Vulture fed:
 The Moral of the Tale was thus,
 The poor old Man was wed.⁹³

⁹⁰*The Virginia Gazette*, 12 November 1736, p. 1.

⁹¹*The Virginia Gazette*, 10 February 1737, p.2.

⁹²*The Virginia Gazette*, 26 October 1739, p. 1.

⁹³*The Virginia Gazette*, 9 March 1738/9, p. 3.

Themes of women's weakness prevailed through the century, although by the 1770s, men were urged to understand, rather than condemn them. The 21 January 1773 issue of the *Gazette* carried an advice essay on marriage in which the good husband "attributes her [his wife's] Folly to her Weakness, her Imprudence to her Inadvertancy, and he therefore passes them over with good nature and pardons them with Indulgences."⁹⁴ From his apparently sympathetic perspective, the essayist urged patience and forbearance upon his male readers for the foibles of their wives; allowances must be made for their female nature. One does not punish a child for being a child - why be angry at thoughtless feminine behavior?

An "Essay on Women," also published in 1773, elaborated upon the essential differences between the male and female character that James Fordyce had also found so compelling. The natural softness of women did not render them "mere ornaments," the enlightened writer began, but in fact served a real purpose: to complement men. "Women soften and polish men," the *Gazette* explained, echoing Fordyce's thinking, "the intimate connection between them is for general advantage." Men saved "female minds, overwhelmed by Trifles, [from] languishing in Ignorance. . . .recalling them to more elevated Objects.. . . Thus the two Sexes ought to be perfected by one another."⁹⁵ Such views were actually an improvement upon those of Lord Chesterfield, whose published letters to his son were often recommended reading to young men. "Women, then, are only children of a larger growth . . . A man of sense only trifles with them, plays with

⁹⁴ *The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, 21 January 1773, 1:3.

⁹⁵ *The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, 4 March 1773, 2:1.

them, humours and flatters them, as he does with a sprightly, forward child; but he neither consults them about, nor trusts them with serious matters."⁹⁶

Some commentators, while acknowledging the principle of male superiority, sought to smooth over its harsher aspects. "It is impossible for any Company of people to subsist any while together . . . where all will Command, none will Obey," *The Lady's Library* explained reasonably, "Even among Friends and Equals, where the least Pretence to Preeminence would dissolve the Friendship . . . yet is there a necessity that one should yield it to the other." This is evident, the writer continued, whether the subject is a kingdom, a corporation, or a family.⁹⁷ Other writers argued that the success of the family depended not only upon the pliability of the wife but upon mutual love; too many people were unhappy, not "because Marriage is a miserable State . . . or that the other Sex is less pleasant or agreeable than our own; but because the Money is often married instead of the Person."⁹⁸ Another poem sent by an anonymous Virginian deplored "Vows so warm, and so sincere . . . The Reason of his Flame was clear, the Nymph was Rich, which Damon knew."⁹⁹ *The Lady's Library* declared that "for a Woman to make a Vow to the Man, and yet intend only to marry his Fortune, or his Title, is the basest Insincerity . . . and may well be presum'd one Cause why so few Matches are happy."¹⁰⁰ There was no

⁹⁶W. Ernst, ed., *Beaux and Belles of England: Lord Chesterfield*, vol. 2 (London: The Grolier Society, 1900), 302-303, 5 September 1748.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 37-39. This section of *The Lady's Library* was lifted from Allestree's *Ladies Calling*.

⁹⁸*The Virginia Gazette*, 7 April 1738, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁹*The Virginia Gazette*, 22 April 1737, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰*The Lady's Library*, with a dedication by Sir Richard Steele, 6th ed. (London, 1751), 35.

mention made of men who did precisely the same thing; yet the notice announcing the marriage of Salley Berkeley that described the bride as "a young Lady of great Beauty, and Fortune" was typical in the attention paid to the bride's fortune. Wedding announcements in Virginia unfailingly commented upon the beauty of the bride's fortune, if not always her face. Wedding announcements from London were also popular - and more precise regarding the amount of the fortune. Miss Mary Savage of London was possessed of both "fine Accomplishments, and a Fortune of L10,000." ¹⁰¹

The happiest marriages were those in which the wives acquiesced to their husbands' authority, strength, and intelligence. Wives could turn obedience to their advantage: "Smiles and sweet compliance are the most convincing Arguments to win the heart," one essayist wrote, trying to persuade his women readers, "to yield is the only way to conquer." When wives offered their husbands willing compliance and patient forbearance, they succeeded in the "business of her Life . . . keeping her husband's love." ¹⁰²

Halifax had admitted the double standard that existed in law and custom almost a full century earlier than the *Gazette* essayist; both tried to accommodate it in their advice. Although Halifax urged his readers to use their powers of moral suasion to overcome it in particular situations, he essentially urged them to ignore it; the *Gazette* essayist tried to offer an underlying philosophy that would offer happiness to wives, rather than a quiet life of sustained misery. Unfortunately, the formula to happiness was much the same as

¹⁰¹*The Virginia Gazette*, 19 November 1736, p. 4.. For just a sample of countless examples, see (all in *The Virginia Gazette*) 29 October 1736, p. 4; 21 July 1738, p. 4; 22 September 1738 p.4; 22 June 1739, p.3; 2 August 1739, p. 3. For London weddings, see 18 March 1737 and 20 October 1738, p.3.

¹⁰²*The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, 4 March 1773.

Halifax's: make your husband's happiness your "care and study;" if he is happy the rest of the family will be also. At least this way of thinking attempted to acknowledge the wife's needs, but her main business must be "to keep her husband's love" if only for the very practical reason that "a Wife can have no other Power, but what that gives her, and if once that is lost her Case is bad indeed." This practical caution was repeated in another essay, as a wife was instructed to "make it her Business to serve. . . and to oblige her Husband, being conscious that everything which promotes his Happiness must in the End contribute to her own."¹⁰³

There was no way around the fact that choosing marriage, much less choosing a spouse, was "the important Crisis upon which our Fate depends."¹⁰⁴ Even as an essay entitled "On Love" in 1768 urged fathers to follow the example of Charlemagne, allowing their daughters the freedom to choose their husbands, it described the daughters as the "the chief disposers of their liberty." The presumption, of course, was that their liberty ended with marriage.¹⁰⁵ But the 1767 essay "On Marriage" that urged men to be "as attentive to her mind" as to the "charms of her face," indicates some change in thinking about wives as less ornamental and frivolous.¹⁰⁶

The *Gazette* may not have examined the relative natures of men and women in the exquisite detail rendered by Fordyce. It is not the quality of the writing that is at issue

¹⁰³ *The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, 21 January 1773, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Smith Shaw to her niece Abigail Adams Smith, 27 November 1786, quoted in Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1980), 42.

¹⁰⁵ *The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, 14 July 1768, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ *The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, 19 November 1767.

here, however, but the quantity and the content. The elegance of colonial writing and editing may not have been equal to that of the metropolis, but the derivative ideas about male and female functions in the world were the same. A woman's workplace was the home, with her "cares . . . constantly employed in the good Conduct and regulation of her family. . . to prevent Disorder there; to make his Home always pleasing to him." The husband's province was somewhat broader: to "manage the Grand Affairs of Life."¹⁰⁷ The quiet obedience and desire to please that were inherent in women suited them for a lifetime of preserving peace in the home; masculine strength and courage equipped men to handle the buffeting winds of outdoor affairs.

Although the writings in the *Gazette* reflected the dominant Anglican culture of Virginia, beliefs about the divinely established social order and the innate inferiority of women were not limited to the Anglican establishment. Evangelical preaching, which began to appear in England and the colonies by the 1740s, did not abandon conventional ways of thinking about gender. It did, however, change the sermon from the elegantly styled moral essay typified by Archbishop Tillotson to an appeal to the heart, best exemplified by the preaching of George Whitefield and John Wesley. It was probably not surprising that the measured, rational tone of eighteenth-century preaching was unable to satisfy the spiritual and psychological needs of the congregations. In stressing the subordination of passions to reason, intellectual respectability for Christianity had been bought at the cost of human emotion. The mark of evangelicalism, however, was the primary place of the heart in the religious experience. Evangelical preachers insisted

¹⁰⁷ *The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie & Dixon, 26 November 1772.

upon the pervasiveness of sin in the human experience, the saving grace of faith in Christ, and the necessity for an inner piety.¹⁰⁸

As George Whitefield traversed the colonies in nine triumphant tours, he posed the same question everywhere, "Are you saved?" Since the answer was always no (Whitefield preached original sin and the doctrine of election), the paroxysms of guilt and remorse followed that could be relieved only by the complete surrender of hearts and lives to Christ.¹⁰⁹ While Tillotson urged his hearers to get right with each other, James Downey commented, "evangelicals exhorted men to get right with God."¹¹⁰

The enthusiasm that swept New England with Whitefield's first visit in 1739 barely ruffled the South. It was not until the visit of Presbyterian Samuel Davies that Virginia began to experience dissent in any significant way. Davies was, in Patricia Bonomi's felicitous phrase, "the ideal apostle of dissent to the decorous Virginians."¹¹¹ Eschewing extremes, he politely called upon Governor William Gooch, to petition for a license to preach. Granted permission to preach at four meetinghouses, Davies

¹⁰⁸ Downey, *The Eighteenth-Century Pulpit*, 65.

¹⁰⁹ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 186-7.

¹¹⁰ Downey, *The Eighteenth-Century Pulpit*, 131.

¹¹¹ Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press), 182.

nevertheless incurred the ridicule of some Anglicans who sneered at the "great numbers of poor people, who, generally, are his only followers."¹¹²

While evangelical movements are portrayed generally as more egalitarian than established churches, there is no sign that Davies held anything other than conventional ideas about women.¹¹³ He was much taken with a tomb inscription in Derby England, "erected by a tender Husband for his Wife" that read

"She was-----But Words are wanting to say what;
Think what a *Wife* should be, and she was that."

"The longest Epitaph would not have been so striking and significant to me;" he wrote reflectively, "and it bro't my Chara [his wife Jane] to my Mind." The term "wife" had been so clearly delineated by Scripture and biology, and so thoroughly explicated in sermons and advice literature, it needed no further comment. Davies's entry shows his acceptance of contemporary thinking on gender. His diary of his travel to England, for another example, mentions only two women, one the widow of Philip Doddridge and the other a Mrs. Hallows who was a "dextrous Disputant in the Trinitarian Controversy."

After he had compiled a list of correspondents in England and Scotland, friends both old and new, Mrs. Doddridge is the only woman's name that appeared. His compelling conversation with Mrs. Hallows notwithstanding, he did not care to continue that

¹¹² Quoted in *ibid.*

¹¹³ See Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, for a challenge to this view of the egalitarian nature of evangelical revivals.

acquaintance, choosing instead to perpetuate the other in memory of the husband he had so admired.¹¹⁴

Reverend Devereux Jarratt makes the point even more strongly. The Virginia-born son of a tobacco farmer, he rose by means of his excellent memory and wonderful voice, to an Anglican pulpit.¹¹⁵ Along the way, he discovered evangelical piety and became a correspondent of John Wesley's, although he never abandoned Anglicanism for Methodism. Nor did he ever abandon the social conventions that Anglicanism in Virginia did so much to preserve before the Revolution.¹¹⁶

In true evangelical style, Jarratt preached about the "unhappy condition of the multitudes" that were "ready to sink down to hell under the weight of their enormous guilt."¹¹⁷ Although he chastised both men and women who "endlessly chased" after the "charms of honor, riches and pleasure,"¹¹⁸ he was particularly disdainful of "every female

¹¹⁴ George William Pilcher, ed. *The Reverend Samuel Davies Abroad: The Diary of a Journey to England and Scotland, 1753-55*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 114, 117, 119. Davies much admired the work of Philip Doddridge (1702-51), a Presbyterian minister and hymnwriter in London.

¹¹⁵ Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 124.

¹¹⁶ Devereux Jarratt is frequently depicted as the son of a poorer farmer who rose to eminence by virtue of his ministry. Michael Zuckerman debunks this picture, pointing out that Jarratt's father owned twelve hundred acres of land. Zuckerman, "Tocqueville, Turner, and Turds: Four Stories of Manners in Early America," *Journal of American History* 85 (June 1998), 17, 27.

¹¹⁷ Devereux Jarratt, "Sermons on Various and Important subjects in Practical Divinity, adapted to the meanest capacities and suited to the Family and Closet," 3 Vols., (Philadelphia: William Woodward, 1794), Vol. 1, Sermon III, 89.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, Sermon VIII, 239.

art of dress and frippery, ornament and beauty, that could tend to captivate, and ensnare the incautious beholder," that is, the unwary male.¹¹⁹ For Jarratt, the daughters of Eve still had the power to lead incautious men away from God. Like Fordyce, he blamed women for their attention to such superficialities, even as he admitted that "their education consists a great deal in the art of dressing." And when, after she has prepared herself in a manner calculated to please her husband, "what presents itself to our view," Jarratt asks, "but an *empty trifle*--glaring without, but within void of all solid worth, and destitute of piety--the love of God, and the ornaments of a meek and humble spirit."¹²⁰

For those who protested the innocence of such pleasures, Jarratt thundered that they appeared "totally ignorant of the nature and power of internal religion," the inner piety so crucial to evangelical theology. They might have "some part of the form," he argued, "but [they] were strangers to the power of godliness.--*Miss* may go to *Church*--but *Miss* must go to the *ball*; and when *Church* and *ball* interfere, the preference is given to the latter." Female vanities in dress, dance, and social position were "incompatible" to the practice of religion; siren-like, women lured men away from the exercise of religion with their "innocent" diversions.¹²¹

Jarratt preached "Family-religion" as a way to contain these vices, where "prayer, praise, and devotion" could be heard in every private dwelling rather than the "voice of mirth and vanity, and the sound of the harp and viol." Family worship was a duty

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Vol. 2, Sermon XVIII, 233.

¹²⁰ Ibid., Vol. 3, Sermon XXIX, 282.

¹²¹ Ibid., 283.

"indispensably incumbent on all professing Christians, who are heads of families."

Ignoring those households headed by women, he used Abraham, Job, David, and Joshua as examples of pious men leading their families in private worship. And, having fulfilled this duty, with "what satisfaction may the pious parent . . . take *his* [italics mine] leave of those children and domestics . . . when it shall please God to remove *him* by death."¹²²

Throughout Jarratt's sermon on family religion runs the warning against female preoccupation with things of this world that could sever the family's connection with God, if the male head did not restrain such willfulness.

It should come as no surprise that evangelicals so closely linked to the establishment as were Jarratt and Davies would preserve its hierarchy. But the growing Baptist sect attracted great numbers as it condemned such favorite Virginian amusements as gambling, drinking, horse-racing, and dancing, and by extension, the power structure of the gentry class. The Baptists opposed slavery and even incorporated blacks into their congregations.¹²³ Yet even David Thomas, a well-educated, talented preacher who established several Baptist churches in the Northern Neck, directed that "wives submit to their husbands. . . as far as their commands do consist with the word of God in all things," for nothing less would be "agreeable both to Scripture and to reason."¹²⁴ In a

¹²² Ibid., 255, 260, 276.

¹²³ These developments are described in Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*.

¹²⁴ David Thomas, "The Virginian Baptist" (Baltimore: Enoch Story, 1774), in L. F. Greene, ed., *The Writings of John Leland* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 58. Thomas had moved from Pennsylvania and established Broad Run Church on the Northern Neck in 1762. That twenty-three people were baptized the day after its organization suggests an interest in the Baptist sect in the region before its establishment there. Thomas traveled widely, and Broad Run Church spawned many smaller congregations, including

funeral sermon in 1794, a Baptist preacher gave two reasons "why the woman should be in subjection to man. The first is taken from the order of nature: *The Man was first made*; the second from the order of sin; *The woman was first in the Transgression.*"¹²⁵

Even at the end of the century, the Genesis story continued to figure prominently in constructions of gender in a sect that was relatively egalitarian. But just as some English writings changed their tone, if not their emphasis, over the course of the century, so, too, did Virginian. As James Fordyce in the 1760s had appealed to women's responsibility to exercise their civilizing influence over men, so too did the writers in the *Gazette* attempt to woo their readers by softening the ruling hand of the patriarchy. This was not to say that patriarchy in Virginia was softened, but rather, at times, the face of it was.¹²⁶

Dr. John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, published in London in 1774 and an immediate success on both sides of the Atlantic, is a perfect example of the tensions and contradictions that patriarchy presented to thinking men and women in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Gregory's advice that it would be better to remain single to "becom[ing] the slaves of a fool's or tyrant's caprice," offers a distinct contrast to the views in 1773 of the *Gazette* writer who defined the good wife as "humble and

Chappawamsic Baptist Church, and its offshoot, Potomac Baptist Church.

¹²⁵ "A Sermon delivered at the interment of Mrs. Lydia Northrop, wife of Mr. Stephen Northrup, who departed this life April 26, 1794," Chesire, Connecticut. Quoted in L. Greene, ed. *The Writings of the late Elder John Leland including some events in his life written by himself*. (New York: G. W. Wood, 1845), 204. Leland was prominent in the Baptist movement, traveled widely, and preached in the Northern Neck.

¹²⁶ Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, & Anxious Patriarchs*, 366.

modest from Reason and Conviction, submissive from Choice . . . obedient from Inclination" and ever "conscious that every Thing which promotes [her husbands'] Happiness must in the End contribute to her own."¹²⁷ Gregory's declaration was all the more remarkable given the abhorrence of spinsterhood during this century.¹²⁸

That there was resistance to the rigidity of the principle of masculine superiority, however, is apparent in Allestree's observation in the seventeenth century that "the Duty of Obedience, which Wives ought to practice towards their Husbands . . . is of late become rather a matter of Jest than of Doctrine."¹²⁹ It is clear in the verses of "The Lady's Complaint" in 1736 in the *Virginia Gazette* that begged "Then Equal Laws let Custom find And neither Sex oppress; More Freedom give to Womankind, Or give to Mankind less."¹³⁰ It is clear in the masses of writings by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Englishwomen who spent their considerable talents pleading for the rights of women to the same kind of education men enjoyed.

Instead, for most women of England and Anglo-America the literature under discussion here comprised the core readings of their education. With little formal education available to them, women learned in unconventional "classrooms:" their

¹²⁷ Dr. John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774; London, 1793), 74; "On Marriage," *The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, 21 January 1773, 1.

¹²⁸ Indeed, as late as 1790, a North Carolina newspaper described spinsters as "ill-natured, maggoty, peevish, conceited, disagreeable, hypocritical, fretful, noisy, giving, canting, censorious . . . good for nothing creatures" Quoted by Linda Grant dePauw and Conover Hunt, *Remember the Ladies: Women in America, 1750-1815* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 12.

¹²⁹ Richard Steele, *The Ladies Library*, 61.

¹³⁰ *The Virginia Gazette*, 15 October 1736, p. 3. The introduction to the poem indicated that it had been written and presented to the subscriber "some Years" earlier.

homes, shops, on the streets. In England, aristocratic girls generally received schooling from tutors; commercial education did not become popular for girls until the latter decades of the eighteenth century.¹³¹ But even economic and social rank did not guarantee a formal education for girls. Some mothers enrolled sons and kept daughters at home; others sent a daughter to school but kept another at home to be a companion.¹³² At this rank, well-born English girls learned reading and writing, French, sewing, dancing, and drawing. Regardless of their class, Shoemaker points out, "schooling reinforced gender differences." All boys learned reading, writing, and vocational skills and wealthier boys added Greek and Latin; girls' education focused on domestic skills with the addition of polite accomplishments for wealthy students. And "while boys' grammar schools and public schools encouraged self-control, endurance, striving, and athletic prowess, girls were taught subservience and to combat vanity and pride."¹³³ The

¹³¹ Susan Skedd, "Women teachers and the expansion of girls' schooling in England, c. 1760-1820," in Barker and Chalus, eds., *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*, 101-25.

¹³² Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 343 fn. 86. Vickery's extensive footnote provides numerous examples of these various choices wealthy English parents made regarding their daughters' education.

¹³³ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, 131. There is a voluminous literature on education in England. The best places to begin are Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760: A Social History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 165-171 and Anthony Fletcher, "Educating Girls," in *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 364-375. On education for upper-class women see Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*; for daughters of the middling class, see Margaret Hunt, "To Read, Knit, and Spin: Middling Daughters and the Family Economy," chap. 3 in *The Middling Sort*, 73-100. On women's literacy in England, see David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). On the rise of commercial schools and women as teachers, see Skedd, "Women Teachers," in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*, 101-125. On the vigorous protestations by English women for access to education, see Angeline Goreau's annotated excerpts in *The Whole Duty of a Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985) and Smith, *Reason's Disciples*.

poorest girls learned only domestic skills either through apprenticeships or at home; if they were very fortunate, they learned the basic rudiments of reading.

In many ways, education for white girls in the colonial South imitated the English model. Indeed, many gentry families sent sons to England for a proper education. Other families hired private tutors who taught gentry sons and daughters, sometimes in the same schoolroom, as the 1773-1774 diary of Philip Vickers Fithian reveals. As in England, however, the curriculum differed along gender lines: Latin and Greek for the boys, and beginning arithmetic, letter writing, and reading for the girls.¹³⁴ When Benjamin LePetit opened his school on Market Square in Williamsburg in 1773, he limited the number of boys he could accept and offered to wait upon the girls in their homes.¹³⁵ Mrs. Neil's exclusive boarding school for girls offered reading, needlework, music, dancing, and writing.¹³⁶ Middling parents, such as silversmith James Geddy, also hired tutors for their children. Polite accomplishments for the daughters of the household were emphasized at this rank as well: Anne (Nancy) Geddy learned how to play the spinet so well that an ode to her talents appeared in the *Virginia Gazette*.¹³⁷ Other parents structured and supervised their children's study themselves: Eliza Ambler

¹³⁴ Hunter Dickinson Farish, ed., *Journal & Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc. 1945), 33, 149.

¹³⁵ *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg: Purdie and Dixon), 25 March 1773, 3.

¹³⁶ *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg: Dixon), 20 December 1776, 4.

¹³⁷ *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg: Purdie and Dixon) 22 December 1768, 4.

copied lessons her father prepared for her, “written in the fairest hand by him self - - short, but always containing a lesson on piety; or an elegant moral quotation.”¹³⁸

The *Virginia Gazette* contained many advertisements from the 1730s through the 1780s placed by roving teachers, appealing to Williamsburg’s core middle-class population, who sought to set up schools if they could interest enough scholars. Joseph McAuslane was obviously disappointed with Williamsburg’s lukewarm reception of his school in 1769. Advised of the town’s need for a schoolmaster, he “was induced to make a trial, and accordingly opened school, about six weeks ago, at the Playhouse (the only tolerable convenient place I could procure at that time) but hitherto few scholars have offered,” he complained.¹³⁹

Education was a haphazard business in colonial Virginia. In rural areas, poorer white planters often pooled their resources, built a small community school in an abandoned tobacco field, and hired a teacher. Boys and girls attended during the summer months, between planting and harvest, attending lessons in the basic rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic that were probably not distinguished by gender. “Free schools,” endowed by bequests from wealthy planters, also educated the children of the poor. While an apprentice law as early as 1643 in Virginia provided that the guardians of orphans “are enjoyned. . . to educate and instruct them . . . in Christian religion and in the

¹³⁸ Eliza Jaquelin Ambler Brent Carrington to Ann (Nancy) Ambler Fisher, undated but probably early 1809. Transcripts of Ambler Family Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Eliza Carrington was recalling her childhood education; she was born in Yorktown in 1765.

¹³⁹ *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg: Purdie and Dixon), 7 September 1769, 3. On the composition of Williamsburg’s population, see Cathy Hellier and Kevin Kelly, *A Population Profile of Williamsburg in 1748* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Department of Historical Research, 1987).

rudiments of learning,” there is reason to believe this was frequently ignored.¹⁴⁰ Even in the more developed society of eighteenth-century Lancaster County, Mary Horton went to court in 1751 to enforce the contract she had made with James Pinckard that the apprenticeship for her daughter, Elizabeth Mason, would include “Reeding. . . soen [sewing] & knit as a woman ought to do.” Horton clearly recognized the long-term benefits of an education for her daughter; she was not interested in a cash settlement. She petitioned the court to order “the Said James Pinckard Sattisfie the Said Elizabeth mason for hir Learning.” Absent a parent’s watchful eye, an orphan could not expect to acquire even “the rudiments of learning.”¹⁴¹

Regardless of economic rank, girls’ education in the colonial South was substantially different from boys. Even eleven-year-old Virginian Betty Pratt recognized this as she wrote to her brother who was in school in England in 1732 that “you write better already than I can expect to do as long as I live; and you are got as far as the Rule of three in Arithmetick, but I can’t cast up a sum in addition cleverly, but I am striving to do better every day. I can perform a great many dances and am now learning the Sibell, but I cannot speak a word of French.”¹⁴² The difference in boys’ and girls’ learning

¹⁴⁰ William Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, vol. 1 (Richmond: George Cochran, 1820-1823), 260.

¹⁴¹ *Mason v. Pinckard*, 10 May 1751. Lancaster County Chancery Court records, State Library of Virginia.

¹⁴² Quoted in Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (1938; reprint New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972), 195. This phenomenon was not limited to the South, of course. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich observed that in New England, poor boys were apprenticed four times as many times as poor girls; while boys and girls learned to read, only boys learned “to write a Ledgable hand & cypher” or “to keep a Trademan’s Book.” Coffin Papers, quoted in Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (1980; reprint New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 44.

was in its essential purpose: boys were (and continue to be) educated for their vocation while girls were (and in many cases continue to be) educated for identity. The religious literature that formed part of their 'curriculum' underscored girls' identity as daughters of Eve whose paths in life had to be constantly monitored so that they arrived at their wedding day, reputation -and virginity- intact.

The literature that would guide young women through this precarious course, then, assumed a greater urgency over the course of the century as love and sexual attraction figured more in their marriage choices, and parental influence less. John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* indirectly pointed to the importance of educating girls to discern the rake from the honest man. Locke had reflected that the ultimate point of educating children was to prepare them for their emergence into a world of false appearances. "True parents" took this responsibility seriously; it was particularly critical that parents of girls did.¹⁴³ All too often, as Eliza Haywood's stories in the *Female Spectator* demonstrated, dishonorable men hid behind masks, literal and figurative, to deceive naïve women. The helplessly innocent Erminia, for example, was the dupe of a rogue disguised as her brother in Heywood's "Maritius and Ismenia."¹⁴⁴ Haywood herself argued in 1744 that if uneducated women did not live up to men's expectations of them that "It is therefore only the men, and the men of understanding too, who, in effect, merit the blame of this, and are answerable for all the misconduct we are

¹⁴³ Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 14-15.

¹⁴⁴ Mary Priestley, ed., *The Female Spectator: Being selections from Mrs. Eliza Heywood's Periodical (1744-1746)* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., 1929).

guilty of.”¹⁴⁵ The message of the *Female Spectator* was plain: women must not relinquish control of their lives to men but instead educate themselves to avoid the lures of passion and to be able to judge men shrewdly for themselves.

Indeed, virtue was defined as restraint of passion, whether in politics or in love. Gordon Wood has observed that in eighteenth-century England “controlling and channeling the overweening passions,” including those of ambition and greed, “seemed to many to be the central political problem of the day.”¹⁴⁶ Both men and women needed to cultivate this virtue. Haywood, more direct in her language than Fordyce or Gregory, was an important link in the changing view of education for women from the authoritarian approach of Halifax, to an emphasis on moral philosophy that shifted controls over behavior from external to internal.¹⁴⁷ That women learned this, we see in Patty Roger’s 1785 exclamation after a male acquaintance had taken liberties with her, “Don’t you *hate* me? . . . you treated me Ill ass if you thot me a bad girl.” Mary Beth Norton explained that “instead of accusing him directly of a sexual transgression, she revealed her belief that the duty of restraint was hers.”¹⁴⁸ Rogers lived in Massachusetts,

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴⁶ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 108. Discussion of the importance, on both sides of the Atlantic, of notions of civic virtue, patterned after those of republican Rome, has dominated the literature about the American Revolution and the creation of the republic immediately thereafter. See Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (enlarged edition; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

¹⁴⁷ For more on this point, see the analysis of the writings of Betsey Ambler and Mildred Smith in Chapter 5.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American*

but the same belief was evident in Virginia in 1782 in Mildred Smith's moralizing on the seduction of an acquaintance by a French viscount, "why blame the Viscount, had she but kept in View the dignity of her Sex—" ¹⁴⁹ Jaquelin Ambler had his daughter Betsey read *The Preceptor*, a work directed to boys, which counseled a "Passion I shall recommend to your most cautious Regulation is *Love*. What Pain, what Misery, what Remorse and Shame, perpetually follow the loose and licentious Gratifications of it!" To let such passion reign unchecked was "for ever [to] bid adieu to Health, to Fortune, and to Happiness." ¹⁵⁰ It may well have been precisely such parental care, following Locke's recommendation, that saved the sometimes "giddy" and "obstinately infatuat[ed]" young Betsey from the same tragic mistake made by her girlhood acquaintance. ¹⁵¹

Twentieth-century social scientists have studied the different ways that boys and girls learn. Girls, maturing faster than boys, identify with their role models (generally mothers or grandmothers) so they "naturally" become women, unlike boys who were raised to prepare for a trade or profession, and have to learn how to be men. Any "failure" for a girl, from a poorly formed letter to an illegitimate pregnancy, is a deeply personal one that reverberates within themselves; it is a failure to be truly themselves, rather than a mistake of the moment that can be repaired. Girls learn to identify with a

Women, 1750-1800 (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980), 53.

¹⁴⁹ Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1782, Letter No. 4, Ambler Family Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

¹⁵⁰ R[obert] and J. Dodsley, eds., *The Preceptor: Containing a General Course of Education. Wherein The First Principles of Polite Learning are Laid Down in a Way most suitable for trying the Genius and advancing the Instruction of Youth*. (2 vols., 1748; London, 1763), 533.

¹⁵¹ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 1780, Letter No. 2; Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1782, Letter No. 4, Ambler Family Papers.

gender group, social scientists have found, rather than to be individuals in their own right.¹⁵²

Eighteenth-century southern women were also raised to identify with “the Sex.” Raised on the words of Allestree, Halifax, Fordyce, and the anonymous others who echoed them in the Virginia press, they understood how nature and God marked out the parameters of being female. Failure to be properly modest or circumspect, to display their learning, for example, was a rejection of their very nature. How many women would have understood completely Eliza Southgate Bowne’s conclusion of her defense of female education: “I believe I must give up all pretension to *profundity*, for I am much more at home in my female character.”¹⁵³ Time and again in these advice books, southern women read in the conjunction of religious and secular literature their instructions for how to live virtuous Christian lives. It is to the attempt to gauge the dissemination and impact of this advice in the colonial South that we now turn.

¹⁵² Michele Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, *Women, Culture, and Society* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974), 25-26, 43-46.

¹⁵³ Quoted in Joan Hoff-Wilson, “The Illusion of Change: Women and the American Revolution,” in Alfred F. Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 431.

CHAPTER III

THE DISSEMINATION AND READING OF TRADITIONAL ADVICE IN THE SOUTH

On Friday, 20 May 1737, *The Virginia Gazette* featured on its front page an essay entitled, "Rules for the Advancement of Matrimonial Felicity." Specifically recommending his thoughts for the "Consideration of the fair Sex," the writer skillfully blended his admiration for the virtue with which women were born with his interpretation of how women should manifest that virtue within marriage. In an article that mingled appeals to the readers' vanity, the laws of nature, and the authority of the church, he invoked the gendered discourse evident in much of the advice literature for women in the eighteenth-century Anglo-American world. Nature had blessed women with "an alluring Eye, sweet Voice, and beautiful countenance," he believed, but for women to take advantage of their gifts and "lord it over their Husbands" was "odious to Mankind, indeed to the natural order. For women of faltering resolution, he urged "Read often the Matrimonial Service, and overlook not the important Word OBEY."¹ How this message from the English literature was woven into colonial reading, writing, and law, its accessibility, and its influence over the way women saw themselves and their functions in the world, are the subjects of this chapter.

¹ *The Virginia Gazette*, 20 May 1737, 1.

Print in the Eighteenth-Century South

The author of the essay was probably a Virginian. "H.C." submitted the essay to the *Gazette* modestly hoping his "unpolish'd Thoughts" on matrimonial happiness were of publishable merit. The literary quality of the piece is irrelevant; the important point is that the writer drew completely from English ideas of women's conduct and rewrote them for consumption in Virginia. It takes no great leap of the imagination to picture husbands and fathers reading this essay, either in selective fragments or its entirety, to their wives and daughters. Whether the women of the family could read or not would have been quite immaterial; in instances such as this, male readers of the household would have ensured their women were aware of this information from their own local presses. Thus colonial Virginians, literate or otherwise, were connected to the ideas of the larger Atlantic world through their trade in books and periodicals, but also through their more easily accessible newspaper.

The *Gazette* enjoyed a wide circulation from its initial publication in 1736 by William Parks. In October of that year, Parks boasted that "these Papers will circulate (as speedily as possible) not only all over This, but also the Neighboring colonies, and will probably be read by some Thousands of People."² It was not an idle boast; by mid-century, the Williamsburg press was turning out a thousand copies each week.³ Nor was its readership confined to subscribers; colonial newspapers were shared by neighbors,

²Quoted in Lawrence C. Wroth, *The Colonial Printer* (New York: Grolier Club, 1931; reprint, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1964), 236.

³ David Rawson, "'Guardians of their own Liberty:' A Contextual History of Print Culture in Virginia Society," Ph.D. dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1998, 147.

over tavern tables, and sometimes, taken outright. Parks reported in 1737 that "Complaints have been made, that several Persons break open the News-papers, who have no Right to them, and after having read them, instead of Sealing and Forwarding them to the Persons they are directed to, have kept or destroy'd them."⁴ The account books of the Williamsburg printing office for 1750-1752 and 1764-1766 show, in the words of their most recent analyst, "a sweeping geographic pattern" across the colony of both subscribers and advertisers.⁵ Whether over the groaning tables of the gentry or the boisterous tables of the taverns; in modest kitchens or over shop counters, the pages of the *Gazette* were read, shared, and discussed so that, as Richard D. Brown has shown, neither low income levels nor even an inability to read was necessarily a bar to access to the information contained in colonial newspapers.⁶ It is clear, then, that one of the most widely available sources of information in Virginia after 1736 was the newspaper and that a Virginian did not necessarily have to be a subscriber or even be literate to have access to the news.

David Rawson's study of print in Virginia showed that the print office in Williamsburg functioned in additional ways to disseminate information throughout the colony. He discovered that the customer base at the print shop, which doubled as a post office, trebled over the era recorded in the office's daybooks. It was a remarkable development over the fifteen-year span and one, he noted, that pointed to the office's "ability to *move* information through the colony, [more than] its ability to publish

⁴*The Virginia Gazette*, 28 January 1737, p. 4.

⁵ Rawson, "Guardians of their Liberty," 148.

⁶ Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 46-47, 255-56, 350.

information.”⁷ In such ways did the Williamsburg printing office link Virginians with each other, the other colonies, and with England.

A survey of the first forty years of the *Virginia Gazette* shows how thoroughly the literary culture of England permeated Virginia's. Robert Manson Meyers found that nearly every eighteenth-century English journal found its way, "through quotation or allusion" into the *Gazette*, including *The London Evening Post*, the *London Gazette*, *The Universal Spectator*, and *The Westminster Journal*. Excerpts from *The Gentleman's Magazine*, first published in 1731, appeared so frequently during William Parks's tenure as printer that he began to refer to it merely as "the Magazine."⁸ English literary greats such as Addison, Pope, Swift, and Shakespeare exerted their influence on Virginians: Parks published many of Addison's poems and essays; Pope's poetry accompanied many essays (Meyers refers to him as "an arbiter of literary taste" in Virginia); the struggles of the "Rev. Doct. Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, defender of Irish political liberties," were followed closely in the *Gazette*; poems attempting to imitate Shakespeare and essays citing his works appeared occasionally as well. Dimmer literary lights also appeared by name, although without any accompanying explanation, suggesting that their names were familiar to the *Gazette* readership. Other pieces, such as "A remarkable Instance of His Majesty's Goodness and Clemency" from the *London Weekly Journal*, connected loyal

⁷Rawson, "Guardians of their Liberty," 148.

⁸Robert Manson Meyers, "The Old Dominion Looks to London," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 54 (1946), 197. The reference to "the Magazine" appeared 21 October 1737.

subjects in Virginia with those in Britain.⁹ That Parks included so much of this literature indicates that it sold papers to a responsive audience.¹⁰

The *Gazette* borrowed from English sources on advice pieces as well. Although a *Gazette* reader purportedly submitted the essay on Matrimonial Felicity, many such pieces were actually extracted from London magazines, periodicals, or books. The *London Magazine* supplied an account of a man who preferred hanging to going home to his wife and the *Universal Spectator* was the source of the front-page essay, "Reflections on unhappy Marriages," in October 1739.¹¹ These examples only begin to show the literary culture that England and Virginia shared during the colonial period.¹²

Since the nineteenth century, historians have overlooked this link, which went unremarked in a construction of history that featured the New England way as prototypical of the American character. For example, while conceding Virginians' contributions to law and politics, and perhaps agriculture, Henry Adams denied them any other intellectual creativity.¹³ In 1939 Perry Miller described Puritanism as "the most coherent and most powerful single factor in the early history of America;" in the 1954

⁹ *The Virginia Gazette*, 10 December 1736, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 200-207.

¹¹ *The Virginia Gazette*, 16 March 1739, p. 2; 26 October 1739, p. 1.

¹² See David D. Hall, "The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century," in Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 97-150, for a discussion of books imported to the Chesapeake region and their subjects, uses, and their significance in the early colonial period.

¹³ Richard Beale Davis, *Literature and Society in Early Virginia, 1608-1840* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), xiii.

reprinting of his book *The New England Mind*, he declared that the intervening fourteen years had "confirmed my youthful insight."¹⁴

Early attempts to shift this center of gravity, such as Philip Alexander Bruce's massive projects on seventeenth-century Virginia, Julia Cherry Spruill's painstaking work on southern women's reading, and Louis B. Wright's work on the intellectual lives of eighteenth-century Virginia gentlemen, were impressive in their own right, but barely made a dent in the New England bulwarks.¹⁵ It was not easy to combat the implications for Virginia's intellectual life of the often-quoted words of Governor William Berkeley, "I thank God, there are no free schools nor printing" that would bring and disseminate "disobedience, and heresy, and sects" within his dominion.¹⁶ Other works appeared, most notably the edited diaries of William Byrd II and Landon Carter, that showed the significance of education, reading, writing, and the book trade in colonial Virginia in new ways. With the work of Richard Beale Davis, including *Literature and Society in Early Virginia 1608-1840* and *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South 1585-1763*, the very

¹⁴Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), viii, xii.

¹⁵Philip Alexander Bruce, *Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), Vol. 1, Part II, 293-459; Bruce, *Virginia: Rebirth of the Old Dominion* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1929); Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (reprinted New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1972), 208-231, first printed in 1938; and Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1964); Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The London Diary of William Byrd, 1717-1721* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958); Wright and Tinling, eds., *Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1941); Wright, ed., *Letters of Robert Carter, 1720-1727: The Commercial Interests of a Virginia Gentleman* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1940).

¹⁶William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia*, 2d ed. (New York, 1819-1823), vol. 2, 517.

concept of an intellectual life in the south assumed credibility.¹⁷ More recent studies on education, literacy, reading, and the book trades in the south have resurrected not only the classic work of Bruce, Spruill, and Wright, but also essays, lists of books for sale, and inventories of private libraries that languished unnoticed in regional historical publications.¹⁸

Southern Libraries

What has become very clear is that the absence until 1736 of a printing press and its small output (relative to that of Massachusetts, for example) most emphatically did not mean that Virginians were not reading. Seventeenth-century inventories reveal that about one-third of Chesapeake settlers owned books although most of these home libraries were less than five volumes in size. David Hall noted Philip Bruce's estimate that the settlers carried about 20,000 books (dispersed among a thousand households) across the Atlantic, but nonetheless observed that "The story of readers and their books in the Chesapeake is properly a tale not of the few great libraries but of households more than half of which did without books, and of a large group of book owners satisfied with having only the Bible and a few other titles, most probably religious in their subject matter."¹⁹ Wealthy John Carter I owned one of Virginia's larger libraries. He brought books from England with him in 1649; his son, John II inherited the greater portion of the library, but died in

¹⁷Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South 1585-1763* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 3 vols.

¹⁸See for example, Brown, *Knowledge is Power*, 42-64; and Kevin J. Hayes, *A Colonial Woman's Bookshelf* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).

¹⁹Hall, *Cultures of Print*, 118-119.

1690 with only sixty books.²⁰ Hall's observation regarding the religious content of small Virginia libraries was also true of larger ones: fully one-third of the library of John Carter II was devoted to religious and devotional works.²¹ Early Virginians may not have been extensive readers, but they were intensive ones.

By the eighteenth century, however, the gentry had established a thriving book trade with their British factors. The print shop in Williamsburg opened a bookstore in 1742 and the Virginia population that supported a single newspaper in the 1730s had three by the mid-1770s.²² These developments considerably widened the scope of reading in Virginia. James Raven has found that in 1770 Virginia imported more than forty percent of all English books shipped to North America.²³ Scottish tobacco merchants also involved themselves in the book trade. While books were not a

²⁰ Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class* (San Marino, California: the Huntington Library, 1940), 239.

²¹ Wright, *First Gentlemen*, 239-241.

²² Alexander Purdie joined with John Dixon in a partnership that lasted until 1775, when Purdie went solo and Dixon partnered with William Hunter Jr. In the meantime, William Rind began a third paper (at the behest of Thomas Jefferson to print the protesting resolutions of the House of Burgesses against the Stamp Act), from 1766 until his death in 1773. His widow, Clementina, printed the paper for a year until her death. Robert Weir, "Newspaper Press in the Southern Colonies" in Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1981), 109.

²³ James Raven, "The Importation of Books in the Eighteenth Century," Part 3, unpublished manuscript, American Antiquarian Society, 1998, 64. Raven reports these findings in the context of a comparison with imports to New England: between 1701-1780, twenty-three percent of English book exports to North America and the Caribbean went to New England, and nineteen percent to Virginia and Maryland, combined. The balance of trade shifted however by the latter part of the century, so that while imports to New England declined between 1769-70, imports to Virginia and Maryland increased "markedly" in the years 1768-1771, (64-65). The volume of book exports was measured in hundred weights (112 pounds), not actual numbers of books. Books were valued at a standard median rate of L4 per hundred weight (cwt), (59).

substantial part of their cargo, a study by Calhoun Winton revealed that between 1743 and 1760, the two Scottish ports of Greenock and Port Glasgow cleared 416 hundred-weights of books bound for Virginia, an average, Winton estimated, of about 2,800 volumes per year.²⁴

Several pieces of evidence survive to permit a glimpse into the book trade at the Williamsburg bookstore. The *Virginia Gazette* advertised available titles and two account books from the tenures of William Hunter (1750-1752) and Joseph Royle (1764-1766), list not only the titles but the prices and in many instances, the purchasers. Gregory and Cynthia Stiverson's study of these records reveals purchasing patterns that confirm those of other studies, namely, that Virginians read for religious edification and bought books they considered useful, whether to promote the welfare of their souls or their plantations.²⁵

²⁴Calhoun Winton, "The Book Trades in the Southern Colonies," unpublished manuscript, American Antiquarian Society, 1998, p. 15.

²⁵Gregory A. Stiverson and Cynthia Z. Stiverson, *Books Both Useful and Entertaining: A Study of Book Purchases and Reading Habits of Virginians in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century* (Williamsburg, Virginia: unpublished report of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1977); see also Stiverson and Stiverson, "The Colonial Retail Book Trade: Availability and Affordability of Reading Material in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench, eds., *Printing and Society in Early America*, American Antiquarian Society Program in the History of the Book in American Culture (Worcester, Mass., 1983), 132-73. David Rawson has noted that the Stiversons focused only on elite purchasers, those who had bought more than four books. His study counted *all* purchasers recorded in the daybooks, but reached essentially the same conclusions. This trend, Rawson argued, persisted through the early national period. Rawson, "Guardians of their Liberty," 501-502. John Edgar Molnar's "Publication and Retail Book Advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette*, 1736-1780" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1978) covers a longer period than the Stiversons' study, and confirms most of their conclusions.

The records of the Williamsburg bookstore reveal more than that city's taste in reading, since many books were mailed to purchasers.²⁶ In addition, *Gazette* riders, employed to deliver subscribers' papers, made money on the side by reselling books cheaply. John Gemit, employed by William Hunter, bought twenty-four books from him on 3 June 1751. Of the twenty-four books, eighteen were religious titles (including six catechisms). None of the books cost more than two shillings.²⁷

Inventories in Virginia reinforce the point the customers of the *Gazette*'s riders make. Books were not available only to the wealthy: even a cursory study of eighteenth-century inventories in Virginia showed that people of varying degrees of wealth owned some books, even if the only notation was the frustratingly vague "parcel of books."²⁸ This designation was ubiquitous even in York County, whose inventories make the point. In 1706, John Broster's small L34 estate included nine shillings' worth of "a parcell of books." Thomas Gibbins's books, in 1707, were valued together with a "tablecloth, 5 old chairs, 1 little Table, one Case with nine Bottles in it," at L1.15.0 in an estate that totaled L42. Armiger Wade's more substantial estate of L250 included "a parcell of old Bookes and other Lumbar," valued at L1.1.0 in 1709.²⁹ Henry Tyler, who owned twenty slaves at his death in 1729, owned a "parcell of books" assessed at seventeen shillings.³⁰

²⁶Stiverson and Stiverson, "Books both Useful and Entertaining," 21.

²⁷ Rawson, "Guardians of their Liberty," 148. A middling-class annual income was approximately L40, so two-shilling books were affordable. Almanacs cost 7 ½ pence, equivalent to one dollar today.

²⁸"Books in Colonial Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 7 (1900), 299-303.

²⁹ Inventory, John Broster, [1706]; Inventory, Thomas Gibbins, 29 November 1707; Inventory Armiger Wade, 3 March 1709. York County Deeds, Orders, and Wills, 1706-1710. York County's boundaries overlapped the city of Williamsburg in the colonial

Private libraries in the colonial south reflect English literary culture as well in their owners' desire to create on the American side of the Atlantic the same genteel culture that existed in England. In contrast to those inventories that list only "a parcel of old books," some southern elites took pride in their ownership of books, arranging them on shelves with meticulous care. In an unusual early case of inventorying a library, the executors of Eastern Shore Anglican minister Thomas Teackle's estate catalogued his 333 books in 1697, before dividing them among three of his four children.³¹ The library of Ralph Wormeley, numbering 375 volumes in 1701 shows the early development of Virginia gentility.³² Edward Moseley of New Hanover County, North Carolina, compiled a catalogue of his law books "of my Own hand Writing, in a Marble Cover book."³³ The library of William Byrd II, the largest in Virginia at more than thirty-six hundred volumes at his death in 1744, represented in Louis Wright's opinion, "a collector's

period, and therefore would be a place in which, because of its accessibility to the Atlantic trade and the city print shop, one might expect to find considerable and enumerated book holdings. However, from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the end, the predominate citation is "one parcell of old books." See also "Books in Colonial Virginia," *Virginia Historical Magazine* 10 (1902-03), 389-405, for listings of books drawn from inventories of many counties scattered across the colony.

³⁰ Inventory, Henry Tyler, 17 January 1729/30. York County Deeds, Orders, and Wills, 1729-1732.

³¹ Jon Butler, "Thomas Teackle's 333 Books: A Great Library on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1697" *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d Ser., 49 (1992), 462. Divided into four lots and assigned numbers (the fourth being medical books which the executors apparently hoped to sell), the books were devised to Teackle's son John (numbers 1-89), and daughters Elizabeth (90-178), and Catherine (179-282). Butler was unable to explain how the divisions were made: "Neither Teackle's will, nor the inventory, nor the court record explains how or why the books were allotted in this way."

³² Inventory of Ralph Wormeley II, *William and Mary College Quarterly*, 1st Ser., 2 (1893-94), 169-175.

³³ Will, Edward Moseley, *North Carolina Wills and Inventories*, 317.

library rather than the accumulation of constantly used works.”³⁴ In his splendid, walnut-encased library, Byrd possessed a potent symbol of the legitimacy of his claim to gentility and authority. Not for nothing did Byrd note proudly in his diary that “the Doctor [Cocke], who is a man of learning, was pleased with the library.”³⁵ When John Moss’s inventory was compiled in 1763, great attention was given to enumerating everything from six silver spoons (worth L5) to at least twenty slaves. That his books, however, were listed as a “parcell of Old Books,” rather than listed individually suggests they were as much a prop of genteel authority as the other material goods of his household.³⁶ When New Jersey tutor Philip Vickers Fithian resided at Councillor Robert Carter’s Nomini Hall plantation, he “took a Catalogue of the whole of his Books,” and learned that another 458 volumes remained in his town home at Williamsburg. “An overgrown library” Fithian judged, surmising (and perhaps disapproving of) its social rather than purely intellectual function.³⁷

North Carolina, often regarded as a poorer version of the Chesapeake to the north or South Carolina to the south, was also home to libraries reflective of the culture its

³⁴ Wright, *First Gentlemen*, 123.

³⁵ Wright and Tinling, *Secret Diary of William Byrd*, 12 July 1710, 203. See also Rhys Isaac, “Books and the Social Authority of Learning,” in William Joyce, ed., *Printing and Society in Early America* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), 228-249 on this point.

³⁶ Inventory, John Moss. *York County Inventories and Wills, 1760-1771*. The total value of his estate was L1214/10/6. The original is torn, preventing an accurate count of his slaves.

³⁷ Farish, ed., *Journal of Philip Vickers Fithian*, 11 July 1774, 119; letter to Rev. Enoch Green, 1 December 1773, 26.

people shared with England.³⁸ The more spectacular examples are those of attorneys John Luttrell and James Milner. Luttrell's library was heavily weighted towards law books, but also included ancient and modern history, poetry, the novel *Tristram Shandy*, and the popular literature that was a direct link to English coffee-house culture, *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, *The Idler*, and *The Rambler*. Luttrell's wife Susanna compiled the inventory in 1782.³⁹ That she recorded the books by their short titles indicates a degree of familiarity with them that was decidedly remarkable for a woman in the North Carolina backcountry; certainly her handwriting bespeaks a good education.

James Milner's library was considerably more extensive, almost 650 titles by Richard Beale Davis's count, 182 of them law books.⁴⁰ It was a library of a gentleman,

³⁸ On the development of North Carolina see Harry R. Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964); Hugh T. Lefler and William S. Powell, *Colonial North Carolina: A History* (New York: Scribner, 1973). On cultural developments of the North Carolina backcountry see, Carl Bridenbaugh, *Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952); Albert H. Tillson, Jr. "The Southern Backcountry: A Survey of Current Research," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98 (July 1990), 387-422; Gregory H. Nobles, "Breaking into the Backcountry: New Approaches to the Early American Frontier," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d Ser. 46 (1989), 641-670; Elliot J. Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985), 18-43. For the debate on the influence of these cultural developments on the pre-Revolutionary violence in the backcountry, see James P. Whittenburg, "Planters, Merchants, and Lawyers: Social Change and the Origins of the North Carolina Regulation," *William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (1977), 215-238; Marvin L. Michael Kay, "The North Carolina Regulators, 1766-1776: A Class Conflict," in Alfred Y. Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 71-123; Roger Ekirch, *'Poor Carolina': Politics and Society in Colonial North Carolina, 1729-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

³⁹ Inventory, John Luttrell, 1782. *Orange County Inventories Sales and Accounts of Estates, 1758-1809*, p. 368-69.

⁴⁰ Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*, 567. Davis incorrectly refers to Milner

including history, philosophy, belle lettres, music, and numerous reference works, all encased in walnut bookcases. Milner also provided books specifically addressed to women for the women in his family: there were two copies of *Fordyce's Sermons*, *Memoirs of Several Ladies*, *Letters to Married Women*, *Lady Mary's Letters* and the *Lady's Magazine*. Instructional works included *The Young Man's Companion*, *Paths of Virtue*, and *Conversation and Behavior*, in addition to mainstays such as *Rudiman's Grammar*. Thirty-four Latin books attest to the quality of his children's education. Prayer books, bibles, and sermons appeared in his inventory, although only marginally.⁴¹ Milner may have lived in North Carolina, but he actively cultivated the intellectual life of an elite Englishman and ensured that cultural link for his children as well.

North Carolina's geography impeded the easy flow of trade, but reading in the backcountry was not confined to the wealthy.⁴² Elizabeth Commetti's study of the books sold at the backcountry store of William Johnston and Richard Bennehan shows a "brisk trade" in cherished religious works like Allestree's *Whole Duty of Man*, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Book of Common Prayer and educational supplies such as primers, spelling books, and hornbooks.⁴³ Store inventories from 1769 until hostilities

as John instead of James.

⁴¹ Inventory, James Milner, 17 December 1773. *North Carolina Wills and Inventories, Copied from the Original and recorded Wills and Inventories in the Office of the Secretary of State* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing co., 1912), 514-22. I am indebted to James P. Whittenburg and Sheila Phipps for providing the Luttrell and Milner inventories.

⁴² See Daniel Thorp, "Doing Business in the Backcountry: Retail Trade in Colonial Rowan County, North Carolina," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser. 48 (1991), 387-408.

⁴³ Elizabeth Cometti, "Some Early Best Sellers in Piedmont, North Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* 17 (1950), 326.

broke out in 1775 show a decided preference for these materials, and a flat rejection of Johnston's and Bennehan's attempt to introduce the backcountry to novels such as *Tom Jones* and *Vicar of Wakefield*. The storeowners' dip into English belles lettres was a complete failure. Not a single volume sold, and in January 1779 Johnston and Bennehan divided the books between them.⁴⁴ Backcountry settlers may not have read Alexander Pope's *Works* or the latest novel, but they consumed the store's religious and educational works, reducing a stock already depleted by the war's effect on trade. In this, they were remarkably similar in their reading tastes to Virginians. However small North Carolina libraries may have been, they contained both religious works and the educational materials necessary to learn how to read them.

Women and their Books

It is more difficult to assess what meanings a library had for women in the colonial South. As scarce as are itemized inventories of men's libraries, those of women are even harder to find. Examinations of the intellectual lives of southern women from the libraries of their gentry husbands are practically nonexistent. For all the attention William Byrd's library has drawn, for example, only Kevin Hayes has treated, albeit briefly, Lucy Byrd's access to her husband's library.⁴⁵ Did Lucy Byrd, the daughter of a wealthy Virginia planter, bring any books of her own to her new home at Westover? That Byrd was protective of his enormous investment is clear: he built a separate building to house it, hired "Mr. G-r-l [to] put locks on the library", and a librarian,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 333.

⁴⁵ Kevin Hayes, *The Library of William Byrd II of Westover*, 44-46.

William Proctor, to look after it.⁴⁶ In an often-cited incident, he quarreled with his wife after refusing her a book.⁴⁷ Their argument was the second of that day, and his refusal may have been nothing more than residual pique from their first. But, he effectively curtailed her access to the library: he had the power and authority to do so and there is no indication in later entries that she ever tried to disobey him. As the head of household and owner of their property, he regulated access to his library, allowing entry to respected, learned men whose approval he sought, and denying at will his wife's request for admission.

To what extent Byrd supervised his wife's reading, is impossible to tell. Yet Lucy Byrd's signature on the English translation of *The Emperor Marcus Antoninus His Conversation With Himself* is a powerful curiosity, raising intriguing questions about her interests in what would become the largest library in the colony, her access to it, and her thoughts about what she read.⁴⁸ It may be possible, as Kevin Hayes believes, that Byrd encouraged her to read.⁴⁹ If he did, however, his encouragement must be understood to have been given in the context of the meaning of his library for him, that is, as a symbol of his authority derived from his learning. Given Lucy Byrd's many challenges to his authority, he would have chosen her reading carefully. When they read together, for example, he selected the sermons of Archbishop Tillotson. And although Hayes comments that "Byrd owned colonial America's greatest collection of works written by

⁴⁶ On Byrd's library as a separate building, see *ibid.*, 37; *Secret Diary of William Byrd*, 133, 23 January 1710; *Another Secret Diary*, 33, fn. 1.

⁴⁷ *Secret Diary of William Byrd*, 461, 30 December 1711.

⁴⁸ Wolf, "More Books from the Library of the Byrds of Westover," 59-60.

⁴⁹ Hayes, *Library of William Byrd*, 44.

women,” they are (with three notable exceptions) works of translation of classical writers. He also owned Mary Astell’s *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* and Marie Meudrac’s *La chymie charitable et facile, en faveur des dames*, both of which argued in favor of women’s education (and, not incidentally, support Hayes’s contention as well), and Mary de la Riviere Manley’s *Court Intrigues*.⁵⁰ Manley’s book would have resonated loudly with a man who had spent so many years involved in intrigues of his own, trying to win appointment as governor of Virginia. With respect to what and how Byrd’s wife read, however, we hear only her husband’s words; Lucy Byrd’s silence in the historical record on these points makes answers impossible.

Similarly silent was Byrd’s second wife, Maria Taylor Byrd, whose ability to read Greek and Latin would have enabled an even broader range of reading in her husband’s library than Lucy may have enjoyed. Indeed, for all of Byrd’s unsuccessful courtships among fashionable ladies in London, it was the woman who could read Greek who ultimately captured his heart: “When indeed I learned that you also spoke Greek. . . I went completely crazy about you,” Byrd confessed effusively in a courtship letter to Maria Taylor.⁵¹ Byrd records their shared reading as well. On one occasion, Maria Byrd read French and then Latin to him, but there is no further reference to her reading.⁵² It is certainly reasonable to assume that she had free access to library from his death in 1744 until hers in 1771. In any event, William Byrd II was frequently away from home

⁵⁰ Ibid., 45–46.

⁵¹ Ibid., 62. William Byrd and Maria Taylor married 9 May 1724. Woodfin, ed., *Another Secret Diary*, 387.

⁵² *Another Secret Diary*, 16 August 1739, 6.

(as was his son, after him); there is no reason to think that either of his wives were barred from his books during his absences. Her son, William Byrd III, did not appear to take much interest in the library, making very few additions to it during the course of his life, so it is unlikely that he, as new master of Westover, would have restricted her use of her husband's books.⁵³

It is clear from Fithian's diary that Frances Tasker Carter read liberally from her husband's library. Robert Carter told Fithian proudly that he would bet a guinea "that Mrs Carter reads more than the Parson of the parish!"⁵⁴ The library was not a male preserve in the Carter household either. Nonetheless, the well-read woman expressed her opinions only within the privacy of her family circle. When "Squire" Richard Lee arrived, London newspaper in hand, to report Parliament's refusal to allow colonial juries to try British soldiers, an evening-long discussion among the men ensued. Mrs. Carter remained silent on the matter till after the guest's departure, when she astonished Fithian "with her perfect acquaintance with the American Constitution."⁵⁵

Women's reading within libraries assembled by men is revealed as well in a sample of wills from colonial North Carolina. In some cases, women (both wives and daughters) failed to inherit any books at all, perhaps because they were illiterate. Edward Salter devised to his son Edward his carefully catalogued collection, "Richard Bloom's History of the Holy Bible, together with all the books that I shall own at my Death (be

⁵³ Hayes, *Library of William Byrd*, 94-95.

⁵⁴ Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, 1773-1774*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 19 February 1774, 66.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 June 1774, p. 121-22.

they Divinity, Law History or Mathematical.” His wife and three daughters received no books.⁵⁶ In a similar fashion, George Durant provided that his only son “should have as good Lear[n]ing as can be had In this Government,” but was silent on educating his four daughters.⁵⁷ Childless, William Harding Jones chose to bequeath his books to his brother rather than to his wife.⁵⁸

Men devised books to their women in various ways. Some bequests clearly reflect ideas about the gendered order of reading. John Lovick left his law books and Clarendon’s *History* to a friend and none to his wife.⁵⁹ Edward Moseley left it to his widow to decide which of his two sons was better suited to follow his father’s footsteps in the law. The chosen son would inherit his father’s two-hundred volume library and the marble-covered catalogue. To his widow, Moseley bequeathed religious works, “Bloom’s History of the Bible, 3 volumes in folio of Arch bishop Tillotsons Works, four volumes in Octavo of Dr. Stanhopes on the Epistles & Gospels,” and all his medicinal books. To his daughter he bequeathed three volumes on the “Old & New Testament,” in addition to directing his executors to buy for her works by Richard Allestree.⁶⁰

Other men permitted their wives liberty of choice. Frederick Jones stipulated that his library should be split among his three sons “Except those books commonly used by

⁵⁶ Will, Edward Salter, Bath County 1734. J. Bryan Grimes, ed., *North Carolina Wills and Inventories Copied from Original and Recorded Wills and Inventories in the Office of the Secretary of State* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967), 384-90.

⁵⁷ Will, George Durant, Albermarle County, 1730. In *Ibid.*, 167-68.

⁵⁸ Will, William Harding Jones, Albermarle County, 1732. In *Ibid.*, 278-79.

⁵⁹ Will, John Lovick (county unknown), 1733. In *Ibid.*, 291-94.

⁶⁰ Will, Edward Moseley, New Hanover County, 1745, proved 1749. In *Ibid.*, 313-320.

my wife, which I have ordered to be put into her Closet." Upon her death, his eldest (of three) daughters would receive her mother's books.⁶¹ Gabriel Johnston, a governor of North Carolina, left his books to a friend, but only after his wife and brother were permitted their choice of forty each.⁶² James Craven similarly gave his wife Penelope the choice of fifty volumes (the rest to be sold to pay outstanding debts).⁶³ Other men saw only the monetary value, after their deaths, of their libraries. William Little directed that his books, including the ones he had lent out, be collected, sold, and two slaves bought with the proceeds.⁶⁴

It is rarer still to encounter women who devised books. In 1766 Elizabeth Scollay devised all her books to her son Cullen Pollock.⁶⁵ Sarah Allen's 1761 will is a touching testament to the women dear to her as she bequeathed to them her most precious belongings (her wedding ring, gold watch, and a silver tea set), with her wish that her legatees remember her by these gifts. To two grand nieces she left "all the books of Modern taste . . . to be divided between them as equally as setts can be." That these were no "parcell of old books" but treasures is revealed in Allen's instructions for their long-term preservation. The books were not "to be lent out and by that means the Sets may be broke before they can use them." To another niece, she left a writing stand, "quite

⁶¹ Will, Frederick Jones, Chowan County, 1722, proved 1723. In *Ibid.*, 273-76.

⁶² Will, Gabriel Johnston, Newbern, 1751, proved 1753. In *Ibid.*, 269-71.

⁶³ Will, James Craven, Edenton, 1755. In *Ibid.*, 139-42.

⁶⁴ Will, William Little, Edenton, 1734. In *Ibid.*, 289-91.

⁶⁵ Will, Elizabeth Scollay, Bertie County, 1766, proved 1767. In *Ibid.*, 399-401.

new[,] to encourage her in that part of her Education, in which she seems to be making great progress within these late months," and in which her aunt wanted her to continue.⁶⁶

By far the largest woman's library was that of Lady Jean Skipwith (1748-1826) of Prestwoud Plantation, Mecklenburg County, Virginia. At the time of her death, she had amassed a collection of at least 384 titles (850 volumes).⁶⁷ Well-proportioned by any standards, Lady Skipwith's library is particularly noteworthy because it was the product of her own assembly, rather than of an inheritance. Mildred Abraham thought it of little use to compare Lady Skipwith's library with those of eighteenth-century gentlemen and it is true that it did not contain law books or agricultural treatises. But her library bears comparison with men's libraries in its meaning for her. The greatest library in eighteenth-century Virginia was William Byrd's and his diary, letters, and treatises all make clear that he read his books. But Byrd was a collector whose library reflected his aspirations to cultural, social, and political authority. This point is apparent in his presentation of his books: he had them all gilt for a uniform appearance, even his vellum-bound books, which do not take gilding well.⁶⁸ Lady Jean's library was not symbolic. She placed orders herself for books she would use and enjoy. Moreover, she made her choices independently of male influence, even, it appears, during her

⁶⁶ Will, Sarah Allen, 1761, proved 1763. In *Ibid.*, 9-13.

⁶⁷ Mildred K. Abraham, "The Library of Lady Jean Skipwith: A Book Collection from the Age of Jefferson," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 91 (1983), 303. Appended to the article is a list of the known contents of Skipwith's library.

⁶⁸ On the social authority of reading see Wright, *First Gentlemen of Virginia*; Isaac, "Books and Social Authority of Learning," in Joyce, ed. *Printing and Society in Early America*, 228-249,"; on Byrd's library, see Hayes, *Library of William Byrd*, 38. Wright argues strongly for the status Byrd derived from his library collection, while Richard Beale Davis emphasizes Byrd's use of his books. Davis, *Intellectual Life of the Colonial South*, vol. 2, 556.

seventeen-year marriage: both she and Peyton Skipwith ordered copies of *Cook's Voyages*. Lady Jean's independence stands in contrast to that of her two daughters and daughter-in-law. At her death, she devised to them the choice of two hundred volumes each, "to be selected alternately out of the books I died possessed of." Her son and sons-in-law divided the books between them.⁶⁹

Born in Prince George County, Virginia, she had been taken at age twelve to Scotland where she remained until her return to Virginia sometime after 1786. She married Peyton Skipwith in 1788, and moved to his newly-built estate, Prestwoud, in 1797, where they lived until his death in 1805. Jean Skipwith's book purchases reflect the various phases of her life. Perhaps foreseeing the physical (and intellectual) isolation of life on a Virginia plantation, she began her substantial library with purchases from Edinburgh dealers before her return, gathering books on travel and geography, as well as the periodical, *The Spectator*, to retain cultural ties with Britain. Once married, she bought books devoted to housewifery, medicine, gardening, and children's instruction. Throughout her life, her avid interest in history and politics (she was particularly interested in the progress of the Revolution in France) prompted her collection of books on those subjects that amounted to almost a quarter of her known titles.⁷⁰

Lady Skipwith's wide-ranging interests manifestly reveal her lively intelligence and curiosity; her sources were equally wide-ranging. She bought from dealers in Edinburgh, Liverpool, and London throughout her life. By 1799, she turned also to more local sources. Ross and Douglas of Petersburg supplied her with almanacs and writing

⁶⁹ Abraham, "Library of Lady Jean Skipwith," 306, 308.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

materials, including a portable desk; Petersburg dealer John Somervill recommended novels and travel accounts. She bought books from Richmond, Virginia and Raleigh, North Carolina dealers and from booksellers in Philadelphia. She read periodicals from the *British Register* in 1802 to Philadelphia's *Literary Magazine and American Register*.⁷¹ Jean Skipwith was an unusual woman, exceptional in both her catholicity of taste and her wealth to indulge it. Yet her library tracks the history of both publication and reading in the early national period: her later acquisitions increasingly bear American imprints and demonstrate the increasing popularity of fiction by 1825.

Religious Character of Southern Libraries

Other scholars have attempted to assess the reading preferences of early Virginians. George Smart surveyed the contents of approximately one hundred libraries that fairly evenly spanned the years 1650-1700, 1700-1750, and after 1750, he found that seventeenth-century libraries contained twice as many religious and half as many modern literature titles as libraries of the eighteenth century.⁷² Despite the decline in the number of religious titles in Virginia libraries throughout the eighteenth century, the Bible continued to be the one book everyone owned. Indeed, Smart discovered that there was frequently more than one, even in small libraries.⁷³ Related to the Bible were the many devotional works and commentaries that gave Virginians assistance in the practical

⁷¹ Of 384 titles, only six are religious works. Prestwold holds a Book of Common Prayer said to be Lady Skipwith's, but since it does not contain her signature that is doubtful. She inscribed most of her books; that this most personal volume does not bear her name suggests it was not hers.

⁷² George K. Smart, "Private Libraries in Colonial Virginia," *American Literature* X (1938), 32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 44.

application of the Bible's lessons to their lives. What is so striking about these supplementary books is both their popularity and the breadth of Virginian tastes. Puritans John Milton and Richard Baxter and Presbyterian James Fordyce were well represented in addition to Archbishop John Tillotson, Richard Allestree, and Lewis Bailey, Anglican writers one might expect to find in Virginia. Even writers from the Roman Catholic tradition, such as St. Augustine, Thomas a Kempis, and Erasmus, appear in these libraries. *The Adventures of Telemachus*, a work by French Catholic Francois Fenelon, was ubiquitous.⁷⁴ Next to the Bible, Smart discovered, these commentaries were the "most popular books in all Colonial Virginia."⁷⁵

By far the most popularly represented of these commentaries was *The Whole Duty of Man*, a mix of prayers, moral lessons, and practical advice in daily living. Attributed to Anglican divine Richard Allestree, this book bridges the gap between sermon and practical advice literature; it did not pose as sermon literature, as did James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*, but it is too heavily laden with religious and moral overtones to be considered secular advice. Its enormous popularity in England was echoed in the colonies; *The Whole Duty of Man* was found in bookshops and private libraries throughout the thirteen colonies.⁷⁶ William Byrd's copy was bound proudly in "black

⁷⁴O. M. Brack, Jr., ed., *The Adventures of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses*, translated by Tobias Smollet (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1997). Smollet's English translation appeared for the first time in 1776. Most Virginia gentry could read the work in French, however, and it was a popular work; Robert Carter of Nomini Hall, for example, had a copy (Boyer's *Telemachus*) when Philip Vickers Fithian itemized his library in 1774. Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian*, 226. On the popularity of the work, see Smart, "Private Libraries," 35.

⁷⁵Smart, "Private Libraries," 44.

⁷⁶Between 1701 and 1800, there was an edition of *The Whole Duty of Man* printed in England in each of fifty-six years. In sixteen of those years, two or three editions were

morocco, gilt and blind tooled.”⁷⁷ Even in the North Carolina backcountry, it was standard fare.⁷⁸ In his will, John Yeates of Nansemond County, Virginia arranged for his executors to buy books for “the poorer sorts of inhabitants,” including *The Whole Duty of Man*.⁷⁹ William Parks of Williamsburg, who usually restricted himself to the guaranteed profits of government-commissioned work, even printed it in 1746. Despite its mid-seventeenth century provenance, then, it remained as popular throughout the eighteenth century in Virginia as the frequent publications indicate it was in England.⁸⁰

Regardless of its designation as advice to men, women also read *The Whole Duty of Man*. In 1716, it was among the titles bequeathed by Virginian Mary Degge to her nieces.⁸¹ George Hickes recommended it in his *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter*, published in 1707.⁸² John Carter II bequeathed his copy to his fifth wife in

printed. *Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue*. On its presence in the thirteen American colonies, see Kevin Hayes, *A Colonial Woman's Bookshelf*, 44; Spruill, “Southern Lady's Library,” 23; Smart, “Private Libraries,” 45; Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*, vol. 2, 502-72, 580; Davis, *Colonial Southern Bookshelf*, 68, 74. Davis notes that *Whole Duty* was found in dissenting as well as Anglican households.

⁷⁷Edwin Wolf, 2d., “Catalogue of Westover Books Located,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 68 (1958), 47.

⁷⁸Cometti, “Some Early Best Sellers in Piedmont North Carolina,” 324-37.

⁷⁹Wright, *First Gentlemen of Virginia*, 104.

⁸⁰Indeed, it was still being published in the nineteenth century. [Richard Allestree] *The Whole Duty of Man Laid Down in a Plain and Familiar Way for the Use of all but Especially Meanest Reader with Private Devotions for Several Occasions*, with a preface by William Bentinck Hawkins (London: William Pickering, 1842), v-xiv. Parks's bookshop in Williamsburg always had copies on hand.

⁸¹Julia Cherry Spruill, “The Southern Lady's Library,” 23.

⁸²Hayes, *Colonial Woman's Bookshelf*, 63.

1690.⁸³ In 1745 Edward Moseley of New Hanover County, North Carolina commanded the executors of his will to buy for his daughter, Ann Humphries, “the work of the Auther of the whole Duty of Man.”⁸⁴ Late in the century, Martha Laurens Ramsay read it very closely, modeling her spiritual life according to its directions.⁸⁵ Several chapters treat worship and obedience to the Commandments. Other chapters which likely would have been recommended reading for ladies were those that discussed the sins of pride and vainglory and the virtues of meekness, obedience, and temperance in pleasure-seeking.

These same themes carried over into the secular literature and popular culture, as well, as the essay on “Matrimonial Felicity” makes clear. Lord Halifax’s *Lady’s New Year’s Gift*, written in 1688 and popular in the eighteenth-century South, also carried religious themes into his secular work.⁸⁶ It is difficult to overestimate the influence of the works of Allestree and Halifax for Anglo-American readers. Their books were available in every colony: Mary Degge had bequeathed to her nieces *The Ladies Calling* and *The Lady’s New Year’s Gift* in addition to *The Whole Duty of Man*; Boston bookseller Michael Perry was selling *The Whole Duty of Woman* (the largely plagiarized *Ladies Calling* by

⁸³ Wright, *First Gentlemen of Virginia*, 237.

⁸⁴ J. Bryan Grimes, *North Carolina Wills and Inventories Copied from Original and Recorded Wills and Inventories In the Office of the Secretary of State* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967), 317.

⁸⁵ Joanna Bowen Gillespie, “1795: Martha Lauren Ramsay’s ‘Dark Night of the Soul’ ” *William and Mary Quarterly* 48 (1991), 68.

⁸⁶ Hayes, *Colonial Woman’s Bookshelf*, 2; Spruill, “Southern Lady’s Library, 23. Portions of both Allestree’s and Halifax’s work appeared in Richard’s Steele’s *The Ladies Library*, widening further still their circles of influence. *The Lady’s New Year’s Gift* was printed twice in 1688, and went through at least ten more printings by 1756. French editions appeared in 1752 and 1756 and an Italian edition was printed in 1734. *Online Catalogue of Library of Congress*.

Allestree) in 1700.⁸⁷ These works were still being advertised for sale in Williamsburg in 1775.⁸⁸

That authors such as Allestree and Fordyce had made their way into popular culture is evident in playwright Richard Sheridan's farce, *The Rivals*. Early in the play young Lydia frantically tries to evade discovery, urging her maid Lucy to hide her forbidden reading and display her approved reading instead:

Here, my dear Lucy, hide these books. Quick, quick! . . . —put the *Innocent Adultery* into *The Whole Duty of Man* . . . and leave *Fordyce's Sermons* open on the table.⁸⁹

Sheridan's inclusion of Allestree and Fordyce in his popular play tells us several things. Clearly, their works were mainstream reading for young women. But it also tells us that they were not authors read by elite women only. That they appeared in a comedy, whose success depended upon audiences getting the joke, strongly suggests a universal awareness, unrestrained by boundaries of status and rank, of their ideas. It also hints that Fordyce was less than successful in his attempt to frame his advice in a more entertaining style than older advice had been.

Women and Religious Literature

It is clear that southern women had access to devotional literature of all types. Hannah Lee Corbin, sister of Richard Henry Lee, copied in her own hand an Anglican

⁸⁷ Cometti "Some Early Best Sellers in Piedmont North Carolina," 337; Spruill, *Women's Life and Work*, 208; Hayes, *Colonial Women's Bookshelf*, 61.

⁸⁸ "Books Advertised in The Virginia Gazette 1775," *William and Mary Quarterly* 1st Ser. 15 (1902-03), 100-113.

⁸⁹ Richard Sheridan, "The Rivals," quoted in Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 41.

tract that filled 860 pages in four volumes.⁹⁰ Virginian Elizabeth Foote Washington believed that "there is no real happiness without religion."⁹¹ Martha Laurens Ramsay, raised an Anglican in South Carolina, was in her son's words "a constant and devout attendant on divine service; [she] steadily recorded the text, and occasionally made a short analysis of the sermon."⁹² Frances Baylor Hill of King and Queen County recorded reading a sermon and "several chapters in the bible" in her 1797 diary, and on several occasions, commented favorably upon the "tolerable good sermon" she had heard.⁹³ Edmund Randolph described his wife Betsey's [b. 1753] devout Anglicanism in terms of her "unremit[ting] attendance at church and at the sacrament [the Communion service]." Her private worship matched her public in regularity as she addressed her prayers to the "throne of mercy" and placed unquestioning trust in the "sacred truths."⁹⁴ In 1788,

⁹⁰ "Book of Sermons" volumes one through three are lost. The surviving book, volume four, begins on page 563 and finishes on page 860. The letters deal with matters such as the nature of original sin and free will, to proving that Judas was not at the Lord's Supper. Lee Family Library, Stratford Hall.

⁹¹ "A Dutiful Obediant Wife: The Journal of Elizabeth Foote Washington of Virginia, 1779-96," Washington Family Papers, Library of Congress, one volume, p. 29.

⁹² David Ramsay, "Memoirs of the Life of Martha Laurens Ramsay," quoted in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds., *Women and Religion in America: Vol. 2: The Colonial and Revolutionary Periods* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 221.

⁹³ "The Diary of Frances Baylor Hill of Hillsborough", 1797, ed., William K. Bottorff and Roy C. Flannagan. *Early American Literature Newsletter* (Winter 1967).

⁹⁴ Edmund Randolph, "Memoir of Elizabeth (Nicholas) Randolph," Virginia Historical Society, 4-5.

Joseph Eggleston urged his daughter Jane to attend Mr. Craig's service of the "blessed Sacrament of the lords Supper," saying that her mother "Before Marriage always receiv'd it, and never Mis'd, when She had an Oppertunity afterwards." Even the demands of motherhood were not to keep Jane from keeping "the positive Commands of our holy religion," to keep the Sabbath holy.⁹⁵ Whether through devotional reading or regular church attendance, southern women absorbed the preachings that explained their nature and their functions on earth.

The primary lesson, of course, was the essential differences between male and female natures as both God and nature dictated. Invariably, for example, men praised the "delicacy" of their wives, as Edmund Randolph did in his memorial of his Betsey who had "such an unchangeable and undiminished fund of delicacy. . . she never used to me an expression, which if over heard ought to have produced a tinge in her cheek." She was a stranger to "subjects of indecency or indecorum." The "infantine purity" of her manners that sprang from her "unsullied female heart" ensured that her "personal neatness was never surprized," the attention to which James Fordyce would have heartily approved.⁹⁶

Womanly acceptance of God's designation of the superiority of men marks almost all eighteenth-century writings. On the eve of her wedding in November 1779 to Lund Washington, Elizabeth Foote prayed that "my gracious God [may] direct & influence my heart & its affections, that I may make it my study to please my husband in every thing

⁹⁵ Joseph Eggleston to Jane [Eggleston] Cocke, 23 March 1788. Cocke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

⁹⁶ Randolph, "Memoir," 4.

that is not against the divine Laws. . . may it be one of my daily petitions to the throne of grace to conduct myself as a dutiful obedient wife."⁹⁷ Several years into her marriage as she looked forward to setting up her own household (apart from her in-laws), she hoped to conduct her family with "great peace & quietness. . . am also sure it is Mr.

Washington's desire, - & that alone would make me so endeavour after it - if I did not [also] feel a principal of religion in me that causes me to desire it."⁹⁸ As Christian Moore (first wife of Virginian Episcopal Bishop Moore) owned to her husband a few months before her death, "your affection has always been my greatest happiness."⁹⁹ The affection of a husband was reward enough for a life devoted to her husband.

Martha Laurens Ramsay (1759-1811) of Charleston, South Carolina "was well acquainted with the plausible reasonings of modern theorists, who contend for the equality of the sexes," her son David Ramsay wrote in memorium, "but she yielded all pretensions on this score, in conformity to the positive declaration of holy writ."¹⁰⁰ Indeed, she had decided as a young woman that she would devote herself to the study of religion as her brother would to politics.¹⁰¹ Several, by now familiar, texts formed the

⁹⁷ Journal of Elizabeth Foote Washington, 1-2.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹⁹ Christian Moore to Bishop Richard Channing Moore, August 1794, Price Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁰⁰ David Ramsay, "Memoirs," in Reuther, *Women and Religion in America*, 222.

¹⁰¹ Joanna Bowen Gillespie, "1795: Martha Laurens Ramsay's 'Dark Night of the Soul,'" 68-92.

basis for Martha Ramsay's concession: the Genesis prescription that, as a result of Eve's transgression, "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee," and Paul's instruction to the wives of Ephesus to "submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord." Martha Ramsay derived "a knowledge of her true station" from the bible, so that "in practice, as well as theory, she acknowledged the dependent, subordinate condition of her sex. . . . consider[ing] it as a part of the curse denounced on Eve."¹⁰² She never relinquished this view, despite her husband's obvious financial incompetence that kept the family in constant debt from which they did not recover during Martha's lifetime.

When Peter Vivian Daniel wrote a memoir of his wife, Lucy (daughter of Edmund Randolph), he described her "pure and delicate sensitiveness of heart" and her "solemn piety," which combined to form "a being which a virtuous and generous nature [his, presumably] . . . would be disposed almost to idolize." He admired her timidity, which "shone out with an attractiveness that was irresistible," and the "correctness of her opinions," that, we may assume, were in perfect conformity with his. In any event, this daughter of Edmund Randolph, who had memorialized his wife --her mother-- in much the same terms, was a devout Anglican who clearly had internalized scripturally-based ideas of femininity. While Daniel was well aware of his wife Lucy's "settled principles, and of her warm & humble feelings of piety," he was "comparatively uninformed of the solemnity and ardor of her devotion" until after her death when he discovered her diary. In spite of their forty years together, he was oblivious of the thinking that informed her

¹⁰² Ibid.

religious practices and her acceptance of the scriptural imperatives that kept her subordinate to him.¹⁰³

All of these women were Anglicans, that is, members of a church known for its formality in prayer and preaching. The Great Awakening, of course, had begun to change the complexion of the religious landscape in the South by mid-century and southern women responded to the evangelicals' emotional appeal to the heart. It is difficult to date with any precision her conversion to the Baptist sect, but by 1771 Hannah Lee Corbin was a member of record at the Potomac Baptist Church, an offshoot of a church established five years earlier. In 1778, she wrote to her sister, Alice Shippen, defending her defection from Anglicanism. "I am not surprised that you seem to have a mean Opinion of the Babtist religion," she acknowledged gently. "I believe most people that are not of that Profession are perswaded we are either Enthusiasts or Hypocrites. But my Dear Sister the followers of the Lamb have been ever esteemed so. this is our Comfort - And that we know in whom we have believed."¹⁰⁴ Corbin had faced the distressed disapproval of her siblings before. Upon hearing the news, her brother Arthur Lee had written from London an impassioned plea to their brother, Richard Henry Lee, to "recall her . . . persue, try every gentle, winning Art to lure her to herself. He, for whose Honour you are laboring will prosper the good Work & bless its Undertaker."¹⁰⁵ But she

¹⁰³ Memoir of Peter Vivian Daniel of his wife Lucy Nelson (Randolph) Daniel, 1847. Daniel Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁰⁴ Hannah Lee Corbin to Alice Shippen, n.d., probably 1780. Shippen Family Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Lee to Richard Henry Lee, quoted in Paul Verduin, "New Light on Hannah Lee Corbin," speech to the Lee Family Society, June 1995, transcript held by Stratford Hall Library.

remained serenely firm in her new profession, even to hosting meetings on her plantation in the face of hostile neighbors.

It is clear from Corbin's defense of her faith that she followed the evangelical prescription to get things right with her God rather than with men. She described her dependence on God, her love for Him, and her profound joy in Him in a way that makes plain a deeply personal relationship:

I hope I shall never live to see the day that I dont love God, for there can nothing I know befall[sic] me so horrible as to be left to myself. I have wofully experienced what a mangled situation when I desired to be in my own hands. And surely never poor Mortal had so much reason to sing Free Grace as your Sister, that my exalted Redeemer should mercifully snatch me from the Fire when so many Thousands infinitely better by Nature have been permitted to Sin on till they have sunk to endless misery. Glory be to my God for his Pardoning Grace His redeeming Love.¹⁰⁶

Anglican Elizabeth Foote Washington was also keenly aware of the nature of human frailty, the need for repentance, and the hope of salvation -- key aspects of evangelicalism; indeed, this awareness colors her entire diary. With reason, she approached these issues in a typically Anglican way. She was puzzled by the caprices of human nature, "for it has ever appear'd to me," she thought, "to be the greatest contradiction in the world to be call'd after his name & at the same time not to walk in his steps. . . by cultivating humility, meakness & patience." Still she acknowledged her own

¹⁰⁶ Hannah Lee Corbin to Alice Shippen, Shippen Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

difficulty at controlling her temper when "ill-used;" only because God had "possess[ed] my heart with a sincere desire to please him," was she able to keep her "evil nature from making such answers sometimes as would [have] been severe." Yet even she was not completely untouched by the appeal of emotionalism in evangelical religion. While she prayed to have a "truly religious family - not led away with Baptistical notions" she also wanted "a religion that effectually touches the heart - no outside shew--"¹⁰⁷

By the time Judith Anna Smith of Powhatan County resolved to keep a "memorandum of the daily occurrences of my life, and of the goodness of God towards [me]," emotion had become almost a prerequisite of true faith. Smith began her diary in 1789 at the age of twenty, resolved to be more watchful "as becomes a creature that must soon appear in Judgment." She recorded all the ups and downs of her devotional life: on the same day, she was pleased with herself for her meditations during a stroll in the woods, for her attendance at Mr. Lacy's sermon, and her way of passing another Sabbath; yet discouraged when she "had to fight with a hard heart and foolish thots" during divine service. "But," she concluded, "God is kind, I trust he was near me this evening." Then, looking back over the first day of her resolution to be God's, she wrote anxiously, "I hope I felt solemn."¹⁰⁸ Another day, she sought a female friend's advice on religious exercises, then talked with a male friend who raised her "thots towards Heaven." Both encounters were agreeable enough; indeed she was "charmed" by the latter, and her "heart quickened to press on towards the gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem." The exertion

¹⁰⁷ Journal of Elizabeth Foote Washington, 6, 10, 13-14.

¹⁰⁸ Diary, Judith Anna (Smith) Smith, 3 May 1789. Katherine Heath Hawes Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

was too much, however, for her next words read "much fatigued. Could not feel so enlarged in prayer as I hoped." ¹⁰⁹

Smith measured her success in achieving communion with her Lord by the emotional depths she was able to plumb. On day three of her new regimen, she felt a failure at prayer precisely because she felt so "unaffected. . . O where is that broken heart and those flowing tears I hope I once experience at such times, and which should always accompany such solemn duties."¹¹⁰ Surely thoughts of human sinfulness and the imminent prospect of death must conjure up tears of repentance - solemnity, at the very least! Public rather than private worship, and talks with friends rather than solitary rambles in the woods produced more desirable effects: conjuring emotions or quickening her heart. Her need for external prompting suggests an innocent soul searching to respond appropriately to the evangelical preaching it has heard. Eager to respond to the call, understanding that she could not reach God without first acknowledging and bewailing her sinfulness, she looked in vain for the sins that required such grief.

Her diary is a record of her constant notations of God's mercies, her failings in resolution, and her impatience that the much awaited transformation did not occur faster as a result of her concentrated efforts to be good. On day five, she puzzled, "I am concerned to think that after all cultivation I should still remain the same unfruitful creature I have always been."¹¹¹ Her entries broke off for the summer, and in September

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 5 May 1789.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 5 May 1789.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 7 May 1789.

she resumed, despairing that despite "all the lively scenes of nature together with the frequent attendance on the blessed Gospel, as well as every other privilege of reading praying, conversing and meditating," nothing had produced the desired "warm affections to God" that were the barometer of true faith.¹¹²

Corbin, Smith, and even the reserved Washington all show how evangelical sermons that stressed a religion of the heart changed the way women responded to their faith. Conventional gender attributes remained constant from Church of Scotland James Fordyce to Baptist David Thomas. What changed was the basis of that faith from which its truth could be derived. Whereas Fordyce's Anglo-American readers intellectually assented to the centuries of accumulated wisdom of his pronouncements, Thomas's hearers would experience for themselves the truth of his. By legitimating emotionalism in religion, evangelical preaching forged the link between truth and emotion, and the world of feeling was women's province.

Women and Secular Advice

The evidence from Virginia and other southern colonies also shows how thoroughly a part of the cultural landscape the Scripture teachings about gender were, how they permeated the secular literature, and the extent to which colonial American women absorbed them. Advice formulations in the *Gazette* reflect the influence of this shared literary culture. The straightforward advice of the essay on "Matrimonial Felicity" with which this chapter began is one example. But colonial writers also found themselves having to reconcile the tensions inherent in the advice's basic presumptions about proper female behavior. The same ambiguity that plagued Halifax's formulation

¹¹² Ibid., 8 Sept 1789.

for proper behavior, for example, is apparent in the advice column of the "Monitor," possibly a Virginian writer patterning himself after the enormously successful English periodical, *The Spectator*.¹¹³ Arabella Sly had inquired "if it be decent to laugh at a Humourous Scene, without putting my Fan before my Face?" Indeed, so, the 'Monitor' replied; "there is nothing more commendable in the Fair Sex than a free and easy Behaviour: A Woman of Sense may take all innocent Liberties, without deserving the malicious Title of a Coquet." Halifax had warned against going to the limits of acceptable behavior, but who was to be the judge of the innocence of the liberties? If a young lady adopted the "Sprightly and Gay" manner that characterized a coquette, she risked the "malicious title." If she observed the strictest decorum, however, she was equally unacceptable. "A Prude," the 'Monitor' stated flatly, "is the most unsociable Creature living."¹¹⁴ How was she to know which behavior was acceptable and under what circumstances, and whose judgment applied?

Discerning how southern colonial women responded to the 'Monitor,' *A Lady's New Year's Gift*, or *The Ladies' Library* is difficult. As Margaret Hunt commented in her study of reading among urban middling class in eighteenth-century England, "we possess few details about what this actually meant in people's lives." This is truer still when studying non-elites: "we have still less sense of whether, and to what extent, what they read affected their outlook or behavior."¹¹⁵ If this is true for the study of women's

¹¹³ Meyers, "The Old Dominion Looks to London," 196; Davis, *Intellectual Life of the Colonial South*, vol. 2, 616; vol. 3, 1364-65.

¹¹⁴ *The Virginia Gazette*, 15 October 1736, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 178. Robert

reading in England, with its wealth of print, women's novels and contributions to periodicals for example, how much more difficult is the task in the early American South. Scholars would give much for more letters such as Frances Randolph Tucker's, in which she pleaded playfully with her husband, St. George, in Williamsburg, "I beg you would regale us by sending the Monitor. You promised me. Do not deny me this request my dr St. George. I wou'd give half I am worth for it."¹¹⁶

Maria Carter's Commonplace Book

Maria Carter's commonplace book reveals much about how young women absorbed advice of various types. She kept this book in 1763, collecting items such as proverbs, poetry, an elegy to a dead wife, even the words of seventeenth-century Anglican Archbishop Tillotson. Despite their innocuous name, commonplace books were repositories of treasured words culled from wider readings. These words, however, had so resonated with their readers that they were singled out as wisdom to be read and re-read. Kenneth Lockridge has shown how these books are as revelatory of individuals as letters or diaries. Indeed, he further argued that they were even more selective than such private writings, because, chosen explicitly, they incorporated a wider world of experience into a personal one. "Beneath their surface sheen of public knowledge then," Lockridge wrote of eighteenth-century commonplace books, "these are profoundly instruments of personal identity."¹¹⁷ In her neat hand, two years before her marriage,

Darnton also reflected upon the difficulties of determining what and how people read in his study of pre-Revolutionary France in *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 173-82.

¹¹⁶ Frances Randolph Tucker (Matoax) to St. George (Williamsburg), 25 May 1779. Tucker-Coleman Papers, College of William and Mary.

¹¹⁷ Kenneth A. Lockridge. *On the Sources of Patriarchal Rage: The Commonplace*

Maria Carter entered sayings about human nature, love, and courtship into a commonplace book she kept for her lifetime.¹¹⁸

Reflections of traditional advice appear in Carter's book. In a classic echo of eighteenth-century preoccupations with false appearances generally, and female allurements particularly, Carter copied, "Beauties, like Princes, from their earliest Youth, Are perfect Strangers to the voice of Truth." Did she believe these words, as she preserved them? And did she conclude that if one is a stranger to truth, one is also a stranger to reason? From "Mr. Pope's moral Essays," she recorded an illustration of the ridiculous extremes female vanity could reach. Preparing a corpse for burial (appropriately enough, in life her name had been Narcissa), one woman instructs another, "One would not, sure, look frightful, though One's dead; And –Betty—give this Cheek – a little – red."¹¹⁹ Maria Carter was not without a sense of humor, but Pope's skewering view of the female proclivity to vanity is unmistakable. Female inconstancy is the subject of another verse, in which Chloe, swearing eternal Love to Damon, "She on a Leaf the Vow imprest." Zephyr, however, distracted her, and "Love, Vow & Leaf blew quite away."

Books of William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and the Gendering of Power in the Eighteenth Century (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 4.

¹¹⁸Copybook, Maria Carter of Cleve. Armistead Papers, College of William and Mary. Maria Carter was the daughter of Charles Carter of Cleve, King George County. She married William Armistead in 1765. "Some Colonial Letters." *Virginia Historical Magazine*, 15 (1908), 435.

¹¹⁹Copybook, Maria Carter. All quotations are from Carter's unpaginated copybook. The "book" itself is a collection of slips of paper of different sizes. No inch of paper was wasted. Judging by the letter that was used as a front and back cover, the whole was not bound before 1792.

Not all of Maria Carter's entries were so unflattering of women. As a reminder of woman's compassionate nature, she wrote, "Mercy is seasonable in the time of affliction, as clouds of rain in the time of drought." Ever conscious, as a proper young white woman should be, of the prize of an unblemished reputation, she copied several sayings about slander. "Slanderers are like flies, which pass over the good parts of a man's Body, and indulge on his Sores," she wrote. Perhaps she had been a victim of malicious gossip, for in very large letters she copied the words of Archbishop Tillotson. "The worthiest people are most injured by slanderers, as we usually find that to be the best fruit which the birds have been pecking at," justified her in the face of those who would sully her good name. Could her reminder that beauties were strangers to truth have been another defense against untruths spread about her by a local beauty? Yet the best remedy for such a situation lay in a prescription even Fordyce would have approved, "Gentle replies to scurrilous language, is the most severe Revenge."¹²⁰

Carter also recorded thoughts on courtship and marriage. She honored a ubiquitous eighteenth-century theme when she copied the warning "Passions are the gales of life, and it is our part to take care that they do not rise into a Storm." She borrowed from *The Spectator* the only description of marriage that appears in her book, from which we can infer her view of the components of a happily married life. "A happy marriage

¹²⁰ Maria Carter Copybook. Charles Carter of Cleve, Maria's father, was the brother of Landon Carter who kept a voluminous diary for over twenty years. (Jack Greene, ed., *the Diary of Landon Carter of Sabine Hall 1752-1778* (1965; reprint Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1987.) Landon Carter was perpetually jealous of his good name, noting every slight to his character in meticulous detail. That Maria, in her young adulthood, should copy several references to slander, including justifications that sound so like her uncle's voice, suggest several possibilities. Perhaps she "inherited" his thin skin; perhaps she observed how he responded to his critics (which included his children and daughter-in-law); perhaps she had, in fact, been the victim of false accusations; or perhaps she was becoming increasingly conscious of the value of a sterling reputation as

has in it all the Pleasures of Friendship, all the Enjoyments of Sense & Reason and indeed all the Sweets of Life," she wrote, choosing a definition that had at its center the congeniality of friendship, moderated by the intellect. "A marriage of Love is pleasant; a marriage of Interest easie," she copied, concluding logically, "and a marriage, where both meet, happy."

While her ideal of marriage was staid, reasonable, and eminently compatible with eighteenth-century sensibilities, she also copied irreverent pieces that caught her fancy. In "An Epigram" a distraught lovesick swain holds a sword to his breast, threatening suicide because his lady does not return his affections:

Oh! Stay one moment, Chloe said,
and, trembling, hasted to the door:
Here Betty, quick – a Pail, Dear Maid!
—This Madman else will spoil the Floor.

The epigram's unexpected ending, of course, makes it humorous; and the clever witticism could be the simple reason why Carter chose to memorialize it in her copybook. But its humor notwithstanding, this epigram encapsulated the one time in a woman's life when she held power over a man: in this instance, the power of life and death. That Chloe should tremble in fright as she hastened to the door would surprise no readers, accustomed as they were to female faintness of body and mind. That she should have more care for the floor, than for the prostrate suitor before her was quite another, however. It was a dramatic reversal of power, not unlike the medieval custom of the 'Lord of Misrule,' rendered palatable to eighteenth-century readers by its very comic absurdity.¹²¹

she was about to venture into the marriage market.

¹²¹ The 'Lord of Misrule' was a medieval custom of turning the world upside-down. Usually observed around Christmas, rich and poor would trade roles; peasant would

Maria Carter's commonplace book is instructive about respectable femininity later in the century. Quoting seventeenth-century authors Milton, Pope, and Tillotson, she learned the foibles of "the Sex." She learned to be suspicious of beauty, incompatible as it was with truth. Female vanity was foolish, if not laughable; female inconstancy was, in fact, a constant. She prayed to be saved from such follies and sin; she reminded herself constantly of the fleeting nature of riches and of life itself. She jealously guarded her reputation, protecting herself with the mantle of Tillotson's words. She took seriously warnings against passions that could propel a woman toward disaster; she copied reasoned requirements for a happy marriage, although one wonders how likely she thought the possibility that love and interest might be met in a single man. Her commonplace book is a model of the sort of female respectability Allestree, Halifax, Pope, and Fordyce espoused.

It is difficult in our century to appreciate the oppressive weight of advice literature that amassed the combined authority of religion, science, and masculine intellectual prowess to prove women's inferior capacities. It is tempting to highlight and celebrate displays of independent thought, those women of centuries past who claimed the right to judge their own behavior, for instance, and then to point to the 'progress' women have made since. But women of the eighteenth century objected to conventional characterizations of their sex at their peril; to do so risked their reputation and their chance at a good marriage, which of course was their livelihood. Given how less endowed their intellects were, how could they object to the wisdom that justified death for adulterous women? It had been the law "by God's own Award...among the Jews, and

become king or men would dress as women for the night's revelry.

it seems it was so agreeable to natural Justice, that several other Nations did the like," *The Ladies Library* instructed. How could they object to the same wisdom that urged women not to reprove adulterous husbands too severely, so "that if she must lose his Heart, she loses not his Esteem"?¹²²

Maria Carter's commonplace book gives us a rare glimpse into the process of a southern girl's education in becoming a woman. For other evidence, we must turn to women's behavior, that is, the results of their education, for the ways in which they understood and accepted traditional advice. One very clear indication of the colonial South's acceptance of ideas of women's inherent shortcomings, for instance, is the scarcity itself of written evidence that women left behind. It is a reflection of the thinking about the inadequacies of female intellects and of the proper functions women were to perform: there was little need for women to learn how to write and precious little leisure time in which to write. The very process of writing active; that is, it assumes independent thinking, the confidence that those thoughts are important enough to share, and the authority to do so. Women in Virginia and elsewhere in the colonies were taught to read first, absorbing the lessons of Scripture or advice literature. As a result, the southern archives are full of letters, deeds, and accounts of their men, but very little exists in women's hands.

Women's Behavior: Modesty

Of what remains, the self-deprecating modesty that marks these writings offer the most obvious evidence of how women accepted the idea of their inferior capacities.

¹²²Richard Steele, *The Ladies Library*, 61, 67.

Mary Campbell Spotswood, the widow of the son of Governor Alexander Spotswood, plaintively begged her son's help in settling some complex financial questions in a voice immediately recognizable to readers of eighteenth-century women's letters. "It is a thing Improbable for me to decide by myself those weighty matters I now Inclose," she wrote to her son late in the century, "without you will come down, and appoint such gentlemen as you and myself can confide in and consult with them on these affairs[,] I can do nothing . . . as I am not a proper Judge for my self, where my worldly happiness is so concerned."¹²³ Unwilling to rely on her own judgment, she would neither think nor act without the advice of well-chosen men.

Letters to brothers and husbands always assumed a self-effacing air, even in the most affectionate of relationships. Frances Tucker, writing to her brother St. George, set out to entertain him, but told him he "must be kine enough to accept of a little trifling Chit chat and a few undigested Thoughts--I am sure you will never expect from my Pen the performance of a Pliny or any other celebrated writer." Indeed, after sharing some local gossip she added, "I dare say you will have a long Epistle from Sister B. I beg of you to read mine first for I am sure if you dont you will never think it worth your perusing."¹²⁴

Frances Norton took advantage of an opportunity to write to her brother John even though he had not yet replied to an earlier letter from her, excusing him on the ground that "it is not to be supposed that gentlemen in business can be so much at leisure

¹²³Mary Spotswood Campbell to Colonel John Spotswood, 23 December 1794, Spotswood Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹²⁴Frances Tucker to St. George Tucker, 2 December 1771, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Special Collections, Earl G. Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

as to write by every ship."¹²⁵ The demands of the life of trade and business from which women were excluded always took priority over such leisure activities as family correspondence, in a hierarchy of priorities that mirrored male and female roles. North Carolinian Jean Cameron was grateful for her attorney brother's approbation. "I am highly gratified dear Duncan by your friendly professions, I shall allways study to deserve your fraternal love," she assured him. She also promised to "devote herself intirely to your shirts untill they are complete," apologizing that she had been distracted from that task by caring for a sick relative and "keeping house together."¹²⁶ Two years later Jean wrote to him from Petersburg, "I have not heard a sentence from you since we left Hillsborough, but I will not complain for fear of a rebuke, for I can stand reproof better from any, than those I love."¹²⁷ The importance of male approval, the point of so much advice to women, was not lost on Jean Cameron, who was highly gratified by her brother's and anxious to maintain it.

Mary Tucker's letter to her brother reflected less of her sense of inferior female capacities than of the frustrations in dealing with a masculine world that assumed them. Anxious to get seven hogsheads of her tobacco to Warrick, she had been unable to persuade the "Waggoner" to take it any further than Petersburg. Nor had she been any more successful in petitioning her brothers. Thoroughly vexed, she reported to her brother-in-law, John Coles, "I spoke to my Brothers as you desired me but I suppose they

¹²⁵Frances Norton to John Hatley Norton, 27 October 1773, Nannie Norton Collection, Virginia Historical Society.

¹²⁶Jean Cameron to Duncan Cameron, 8 February 1797, Cameron Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

¹²⁷Jean Cameron to Duncan Cameron, 7 June 1799, Cameron Family Papers.

have Business of there own, & you know Waggoners & them Sort of people do not mind what a Woman Says." Glad to have any of the tobacco transported rather than have it sit and deteriorate for another year, Tucker was forced to accept the waggoner's terms.¹²⁸

Letters to other women contained self-deprecating elements, although it was often encased in humor. In 1756, young Maria Carter tried to respond to a request for a "merry & comical letter" describing her days. Although she did not feel that she could satisfactorily perform the task, she began by saying, "Now I will give you the History of one Day, the Repetition of which without variation carries me through the Three hundred & sixtyfive Days which you know completes the year."¹²⁹ Carter's airy dismissal of the importance of her daily life was meant to be amusing, but her wit did not hide the tedium of repetition that marked the lives of women, young and old. Instead, that one sentence revealed much about how insignificant she thought the tasks of her daily life.¹³⁰ Closing a long letter to her friend Eliza Lee in 1806, Ann Stuart caught herself, "How I rattle on, regardless of your patience, which if you are not descended from the immediate family of

¹²⁸ Mary Tucker to John Coles, 22 April 1772, Carter Smith Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

¹²⁹ Maria Carter (daughter of Landon Carter) to her cousin Maria Carter (daughter of Charles Carter), 25 March 1756. Armistead-Cocke Papers, College of William and Mary.

¹³⁰ The endlessly repetitious nature of women's work has been a predominate theme in women's history. A 1904 history of Augusta, Maine dismissed much of the diary of midwife Martha Ballard (1785-1812) as "trivial and unimportant. . . being but a repetition of what has been recited many times." Even a 1970s feminist history of midwifery commented "Like many diaries of farm women, it is filled with trivia about domestic chores and pastimes." Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, seeing that the "real power" of Ballard's diary lay in just that "exhaustive, repetitious dailiness," won a Pulitzer Prize for her analysis of the diary. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. (New York: Random House, 1991), 8-9.

Job must now be quite exhausted."¹³¹ A cousin of Ann Eaton Johnson of Franklin County, North Carolina, begged her "pray dont let any boddy see this peace of nonsense but your self and mother."¹³² All these letter writers assumed that their scribblings, reflective of their thoughts, indeed, even of their daily lives, were frivolous, unimportant, and even nonsensical. All, however, were remarks within letters that sparkled with wit, vivacity, and intelligence. Yet even in a private diary for which she was the only audience, Judith Anna Smith bemoaned the "foolish thoughts" she struggled to fight off during a divine service.¹³³

The crowning compliment to a woman's modest self-deprecation was an obituary such as Martha Corbin's, which graced a June 1739 issue of the *Virginia Gazette*. "Such was her Modesty, that it would not suffer her to discover her good Offices, even to those that enjoyed the Advantages of them;" the writer extolled, "so that her most intimate Acquaintances and Friends were insensible of the Greatness of her Merit, as long as it was in her Power to keep it concealed."¹³⁴ Or the tribute offered upon the death of Molly Thacker:

Good-natur'd, prudent, affable and mild,
In sense a Woman, in Deceit a Child.¹³⁵

¹³¹Letter, Ann Steuart to Eliza Lee, 29 June 1806, Richard Bland Lee Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹³²M. Williams to Ann Eaton Johnson, 10 December 1805, William Johnson Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

¹³³Diary, Judith Anna Smith, 3 May 1789. Katherine Heath Hawes papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹³⁴*The Virginia Gazette*, 8 June 1739, p. 3.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 14 September 1739, p. 3.

Women's Behavior Before the Law

The approving reference to Molly Thacker's childlike innocence was intentional; it embodied the hope of many men that they would never have to play the cuckold, so often mocked in English plays and ribald tavern songs. There was a less obvious dimension to the meaning of innocence: eighteenth-century women were frequently categorized, even by the law, with children (as well as other dependents such as slaves, lunatics, and the aged and infirm). It was a dependency that, unlike that of male children, women would never outgrow. The laws of the American colonies perpetuated and enforced this dependence, assuming that would be a woman's lot, whether as daughter, wife, or widow. They reflected the belief expressed by *The Ladies Library* that "the contending for Superiority [by women] is an Attempt to reverse the fundamental Law. . . . but sure God, with whom there is no Shadow of Change, will not make Acts of Repeal, to satisfy the Petulancy of a few Matterless Women."¹³⁶ As varied as the laws were from one colony to another, the consistent thread throughout was female economic dependence, probably best illustrated in the laws governing women's property holding rights, particularly within marriage.¹³⁷

The basic English common law principle that underlay colonial legislation regarding men's and women's legal rights within marriage was "unity of person;" that is, a married couple formed a legally recognized unit, acting in concert in all things. It was an

¹³⁶Steele, *The Ladies Library*, 62.

¹³⁷Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986). For a study focused on South Carolina alone, see Salmon, "Women and Property in South Carolina: The Evidence from Marriage Settlements, 1730-1830" *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d Ser. 39 (October 1982), 655-685. See also, Terry Snyder, "Legal History of the Colonial South: Assessments and Suggestions," *William and Mary Quarterly* 50 (January 1993), 18-27.

ideal that was both revered and mocked. A married woman could not institute a lawsuit on her own; her husband had to do it for her. If the suit involved her husband only, she could not join it. In effect, Marylynn Salmon points out, the law "limited the activities of the wife while broadening those of the husband."¹³⁸

Nor could married women hold property during their marriage; indeed, any property they brought to the marriage became their husband's. Virginian legislators, believing English common law to be superior to any other, enacted laws that embodied their beliefs in the efficacy of the patriarchal system. That the system was imperfect, indeed, contradictory (forbidding husbands to sell real property without their wives' free consent, for example, or permitting marriage settlements) was irrelevant. Unable to act as individuals at law, women were rendered legally mute. It was precisely because of this legal and economic dependence, Richard D. Brown has argued, that "the strength and influence of social prescription was magnified."¹³⁹

Only in the rarest of marriages did the presumption of uniform interests actually prevail, but even the love of a husband for his wife did not guarantee that her interests would always be protected. Indeed, just after the turn of the nineteenth century, St. George Tucker of Williamsburg engaged in a vigorous correspondence with Joseph Cabell about the financial terms of Cabell's marriage with Tucker's daughter, on just this problem. After assuring the young man that he did not question his "honor, liberality, & disinterested attachment to the Child of my Affections," Tucker returned the discussion to its most relevant point: "the inequality and injustice of our laws in respect to females

¹³⁸Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property*, 15.

¹³⁹Brown, *Knowledge is Power*, 167.

forms one of the principal reasons" for his insistence upon protecting his daughter.¹⁴⁰ An eminent jurist, he was aware of "the reverses of fortune that I have too often seen among Ladies in Virginia" and concluded, "it is my duty to preserve that independence to her, in Case she should survive you."¹⁴¹ Tucker wanted a written agreement, before the wedding ceremony, in which "her whole Fortune shall be settled upon her, and her heirs," although he sweetened this condition by assuring Cabell that he did not wish "to abridge you of the full enjoyment of the rents & profits; & Interest" on the money held in trust for his wife during the course of their marriage. For her part, the bride-to-be approached Cabell "in a flood of tears, she pressed my hand, & said 'Sir, I have read the letter, but know nothing, & think nothing of such matters. Your heart is all I desire.' "¹⁴² In the innocence that she was taught to cultivate, Polly Tucker ignored the financial concerns she took to be masculine for those of her feminine heart.

Polly Tucker was fortunate that her father looked out for her financial interests. English law, followed so closely in Virginia, allowed for the frequent lapses in the logic and practice of patriarchy. A marriage settlement was one way around the system, as St. George Tucker knew. Another way was to allow for obviously contradictory adjustments

¹⁴⁰St. George Tucker to Joseph Cabell, 3 November 1806, Cabell Family Papers, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

¹⁴¹St. George Tucker to Joseph Cabell, 28 October 1806, Cabell Family Papers.

¹⁴²Joseph Cabell to (brother) William Cabell, 1 November 1806, Cabell Family Papers. Joseph Cabell became increasingly irritated with Tucker's intransigence. "I am opposed to marriage settlements on principle. . . they are not only wrong in principle," he told his brother with wounded pride, "but they are degrading in the estimation of our fellow citizens." Joseph Cabell to William Cabell, 4 November 1806. Not only do his letters to his brother show how he missed Tucker's point entirely that his love, honor, and devotion were not sufficient protections for his wife, his strident protestations of impeached honor strain a twentieth-century reader's belief in the sincerity of his feeling for Polly Tucker.

in a woman's legal status. For example, although married women's legal status, *femme covert*, precluded them from engaging in contracts, bringing legal suits, and owning and selling property, equity law allowed exceptions. A married woman engaged in trade could petition the legislature to operate, for that purpose alone, as *femme sole*.

One of the most glaring failures of patriarchal theory arose in the conundrum posed by married women abandoned by their husbands. In a complete collapse of the assumption of the husband's benevolent protection, a wife was left not only without support but without the legal capacity to do anything about her situation. Marylynn Salmon recounts the story of Susannah Cooper who approached the Virginia legislature in 1744 seeking an empowerment act that would permit her to sell property she had accumulated through her own hard work since her husband had abandoned her twenty-four years earlier. She was forced to seek relief because, as the act explained, "No purchaser will treat with her on account of her coverture." Adding insult to injury, many "injuries and trespasses" were committed against her, the perpetrators well aware that as *femme covert* Cooper could not bring suit for redress.¹⁴³

The same helplessness was present in the petition of a financially distressed widow who needed cash to set up her growing children in the world. As several of the children "are approaching the age of majority . . . and will shortly require a reasonable proportion of their legacies to enable them to settle in the world to advantage," Elizabeth Scott begged the court in 1784 to be able to sell some land, the use of which her husband had devised to her. "That your petitioners are satisfied it will be more for the advantage of the legatees to dispose of a part of the lands as the payment of the debts [incurred by

¹⁴³Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property*, 55.

her deceased husband] than to sell either the slaves or personal estate," Scott argued, an act of the assembly could set aside the restrictions of the will and enable her and her children to repay her husband's debts and still establish her children's futures. "Rejected," the court summarily replied.¹⁴⁴

In addition to the slim protections the courts offered women, men in private life also sought to provide the assistance that the helplessness of their female relations required. In a letter typical of this concern, General Everard Meade of Amelia County, Virginia wrote his brother-in-law Francis Thornton during the Revolution that he was "much alarmed" at hearing that Thornton was considering enlisting. "Consider my dear Frank," he pleaded, "how much I am concerned in it. One of us is already in it. Consider what your poor sister with no one to comfort or assist her must suffer. Consider that my whole estate depends on you."¹⁴⁵

Women's Behavior: Vanity

The necessity for female dependence, embodied in English and colonial laws and customs, relied upon the principle of women's inferiority in mind, body, and character and their consequent need for male supervision and guidance. Vanity was surely one of the chief womanly sins against which men perpetually warned their women. William Byrd II refused to allow his wife Lucy to indulge her vanity when she wanted to pluck her eyebrows in preparation for a trip to Virginia's colonial capital; but he failed to notice his own vanity when he noted with pride the next day that the governor had selected Lucy

¹⁴⁴Petition, Elizabeth Scott and Cuthbert Bullett, executor, 1 December 1784. Fauquier County Records, Virginia State Library.

¹⁴⁵Letter, General Everard Meade to Francis Thornton of Amelia County, 16 May 1777, Whitaker and Meade Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

as his partner for the ball's opening dance.¹⁴⁶ When Nancy Carter clipped her eyebrows, her dismayed father demanded, "what bewitched you with a desire of clipping your Eye-Brows- The Genius of Woman shines forth in this little Girlish trick."¹⁴⁷

Women were acutely conscious of their culture's attribution of vanity to the female nature. Indeed, most went out of their way to explain or excuse their expenses on dress to avert the accusation that carried with it the barely veiled implication of frivolity and emptiness of mind. Courtenay Norton wrote from Philadelphia to her father in Winchester, Virginia that she was not overcome by the splendors of the city's social life. "I fear my dear Papa thinks us very extravagant in our dress but it is not the case," she assured him. Most of the money he had sent went to tutors, "whose charges are immencely high." Yes, she had bought a bonnet; a cloak; two muslin handkerchiefs; a few pairs of shoes, and, yes, a few pairs of gloves as well, but they were all "things I was in want of." She admitted to having two of her best dresses made up for her, rather than saving the expense and making them herself, but she was "afraid (being a young hand at the business) I shou'd spoil" the expensive fabric. She tried to minimize any fears about her extravagance by assuring him sweetly that "All my common apparel, I take the greatest pleasure in fixing and making myself & feel very happy that I know how."¹⁴⁸

Polly Coles of rural Albermarle County quite frankly took advantage of her aunt's presence in Philadelphia to brush up on the latest fashion news. Catherine Coles wrote to

¹⁴⁶ Wright and Tinling, eds., *Secret Diary of William Byrd*, February 5 and 6, 1711, 296-97.

¹⁴⁷ Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian*, 6 July 1774, 132.

¹⁴⁸ Letter, Courtenay Norton to John Hatley Norton, 7 January 1791, Nannie Norton Collection, Virginia Historical Society.

her niece in 1794, detailing the "Gowns [that] are pleated very far back. . . Colour'd Silk ones are worn with Muslin Petticoats over a white Silk or Satten, Jackets & Petticoats are another Dress of a different Shape from those that you have Seen," and continuing about bonnets, sashes, and slippers ("no buckles") in a letter almost wholly devoted to the latest styles.¹⁴⁹ The rector of Trinity Church in New York City wrote to his nephew, St. George Tucker of Virginia, that his daughters were to have taken time to write as well but were much occupied by taking care of "some gowns (new ones) [that] were Spoilt by the too officious conduct of the Beaus."¹⁵⁰

An English admirer of Edward Ambler, a young Virginian studying in England, chided him for not writing; his recent illness was an acceptable excuse, she owned, but nothing less would do! Vanity could not permit anything else, although she was trying to "give up this principal of vanity with pleasure[,] a thing they say is hard to be parted with by my Sex." Despite that conventional wisdom, however, she curiously "found no struggle in resigning it."¹⁵¹

Women's Behavior: Conversation

Women also required masculine guidance with respect to their conversation. James Fordyce had much to say on this subject; the daughters of Eve could not escape their tendency to gossip. Frances Randolph deplored the "impertinent curiosity, so

¹⁴⁹Catherine Coles (Philadelphia) to Polly Coles (Albermarle) 31 May 1794, Carter Smith Papers, University of Virginia.

¹⁵⁰Rev. Samuel Auchmuty to St. George Tucker, 15 February 1772, Tucker-Coleman Papers, College of William and Mary.

¹⁵¹Maria [?] to Edward Ambler, 13 December [1748-1768], Elizabeth Barbour Ambler Papers, University of Virginia.

prevalent in our sex" that inspired so much idle talk.¹⁵² Cornelius Baldwin took the occasion of his sister's marriage to warn her against this peculiarly feminine trait.

"Remember my dear Girl that the Devil is not dead," he warned her. "The Shafts of envy may & probably will be levelled & the malignant prattle of female malice let fly at you. The more conspicuous your merit, " he explained, "the more you have to apprehend." Like Fordyce, he believed the best weapon against female barbs was for her "whole conduct & carriage [to] be unaffectedly modest and unassuming."¹⁵³ It was not new advice: two generations earlier, Maria Carter had copied into her copybook that "Gentle replys to scurrilous language is the most severe Revenge."¹⁵⁴

The safest course was to say as little as possible. Tutor Philip Fithian judged Priscilla Heale, a visitor to Robert Carter's Nomini Hall plantation, "from her Carriage that her Modesty is invincible." He tried vainly to coax her into conversation for two days, concluding from her reticence, "it is sufficient to say that I think She is far removed from most of the foibles of Women." Similarly, he approved of Jenny Washington in her emulation of Fordyce's advice, "She is not forward to begin a conversation, yet when spoken to She is extremely affable, without assuming any Girlish affectation, or pretending to be overcharg'd with Wit."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵²Frances Randolph to her husband-to-be St. George Tucker, 27 August 1778. Tucker-Coleman Papers, College of William and Mary.

¹⁵³Letter, Cornelius Baldwin (Winchester) to his sister, Mrs. Archibald [Betsey] Stuart (Staunton), 1791. Alexander H. H. Stuart Papers, University of Virginia.

¹⁵⁴Copybook of Maria Carter, 1763. Armistead-Cocke Papers, College of William and Mary.

¹⁵⁵Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian*, 24 June 1774, 123-25.

Landon Carter tried in vain to control the outbursts of his daughter-in-law, Winifred Beale Carter, who lived with her husband and children at Landon's plantation, Sabine Hall. In one altercation, unable to tolerate his grandson's impertinence to his parents, Landon Carter struck him with a whip. "Madame then rose like a bedlamite that her child should be struck with a whip," he wrote, directly linking her anger to the lunacy of the residents of the famous British asylum. For Carter, Winifred's loss of temper was equivalent to a loss of reason that he saw as typically female. He failed to characterize, in like manner, his own anger at his grandson's disrespect, even as he resolved to discontinue his support of him, "I have been at great expence hitherto in maintaining him but I will be at no more. And so I shall give notice."¹⁵⁶ During another quarrel, Carter "cautioned her to keep to the truth and not to let her passions carry her out of the bounds of it." He fumed that his daughter-in-law had made matters worse in teaching the same lack of self-restraint to his granddaughter Lucy. Lucy, he observed, "has already got to be as sawsy a Minx as ever sat at my table."¹⁵⁷

Carter resurrected the age-old explanation for the female inability to control passion. Since Paradise, he believed, Eve "suffered the devil to tempt her; and of such a tendency has her sex been" and women ever since had "so much of the devil in them." The biblical perspective enabled him to understand women's failings as universal, while he viewed men's faults as specific to the individual, minor (relative to those of women), and correctable. Richard Henry Lee he thought possessed of "a private failing or two," including a susceptibility to flattery. But if Lee could only see his fault, Carter was sure

¹⁵⁶ Greene, ed., *Diary of Landon Carter*, 27 June 1766, 310.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 January 1772, 646.

that “from his principles of Public Virtue he would leave them off.” Women, on the other hand, had no such ability to see themselves as they are, nor the strength of mind and character to correct faults. Their vulnerability to the devil as daughters of Eve, “treacherous, interprising, Perverse, and [possessing] hellish Genius” precluded women from possessing honor and virtue in the ways men understood.¹⁵⁸

A generation earlier William Byrd also believed in the superiority of male over female. But it was a belief intimately connected with his ego (and perhaps as fragile): in the privacy of his coded diary, he admitted cheating at cards with his wife Lucy one afternoon.¹⁵⁹ Gambling at cards, racing, or cock fights was a favorite gentry diversion that carried no shame, no matter how much one lost of cash, land, or slaves. Cheating at cards, however, Louis Wright has observed, “was a cardinal sin sufficient to exclude a guilty one from the society of decent men.”¹⁶⁰ But it was crucial for Byrd to maintain his male superiority, even at cards. He suspended a code of honor he understood to be masculine while playing with his wife, even though his prized credibility as a gentleman would be lost if he cheated among men. But honor was not a consideration in play with

¹⁵⁸ Greene, ed., *Diary of Landon Carter*, 27 April 1777, 1103; 18 August 1772, 712-13. For Landon Carter’s ideas on honor, see Jack Greene’s introduction to the *Diary of Landon Carter*, 13-28. On male honor in the South, generally, see T.H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 137-186.

¹⁵⁹ Wright and Tinling, eds., *Secret Diary of William Byrd*, 27 August 1709, 75.

¹⁶⁰ Even the law punished cheaters, Wright noted. A tailor in York county was fined for entering his horse in a race against a gentleman’s; the gentleman however, was confined to the stocks when it was discovered that he tried to fix the race. Wright, *First Gentlemen*, 88.

women, nor was the obvious paradox of the situation. Byrd did not appear to realize that if he was in truth superior, it would not require cheating to prove it.

Female Respectability

Women such as Lucy Byrd challenged male authority in a variety of subjects, but generally they deferred to men with respect to matters of religion. Religious writers such as Archbishop John Tillotson, Jeremy Taylor, Lewis Bayley, and James Fordyce found a receptive audience in the colonies. Maria Carter, for example, copied Tillotson into her book. Mary Ambler copied Fordyce's advice for her daughter.¹⁶¹ Judith Anna Smith's diary recorded her efforts to "deliberately be more engaged in Religion." Frequently, however, she gave way to frustration and near-despair with her "deadness of heart," weak faith, or ingratitude towards her God. Talks with a male companion revived her faith, as when she "Talked with Alexis coming home. he raised my thots towards Heaven." But at home alone later that evening, without Alexis's guiding influence, Smith admitted she "could not feel so enlarged in prayer as I hoped I should. O! how inconstant is my heart O L^d" More than once did she admit that she was more affected by public prayer, led by male ministers, than by her own private devotions.¹⁶²

It was in meek and modest deportment that eighteenth-century women best conformed (outwardly, at least) to the popular wisdom of their inferiority to men. Obituaries such as Martha Corbin's publicly extolled such virtuous women. Maria Carter's copybook included an elegy in which Lord Lyttleton described his dead wife as

¹⁶¹ Diary of M. Ambler, 1770. *Virginia Historical Magazine* 45 (April 1937), 170.

¹⁶² Diary, Judith Anna Smith, 4 and 5 May, 1789.

"made to engage all Hearts, and charm all Eyes; Tho' meek [and] magnanimous."¹⁶³ In letter after letter, female writers begged to be excused for the "little tattle of a female pen."¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth Foote Washington believed that she would never get to heaven if she did not "cultivat[e] humility, meakness & patience within [her] heart." It was not always easy: "I have been used extremely ill in time past. . . and wonder'd how I could bear such treatment, -- but I must."¹⁶⁵

Even travel in the wilderness did not diminish the importance of proper feminine behavior and decorum, hardship, illness, or Indian attacks notwithstanding. Two remarkable travel accounts demonstrate the point. Charlotte Browne was a widowed Englishwoman who travelled as a hospital matron with General Braddock's army in which her brother served as a commissary officer.¹⁶⁶ Her diary recounted her brother's death in the wilderness in 1755 and her harrowing trip east, grief-stricken, ill, and fearful of Indian attacks, after Braddock's defeat at Fort Cumberland. Throughout her account, however, she never lost her sense of decorum nor deference to the men who assisted her.

¹⁶³Copybook of Maria Carter, 1763.

¹⁶⁴Letter, Elizabeth Bush to John Burgwyn, 19 December 1779. Burgwyn, a North Carolinian had met Bush in England where he had gone to have a broken leg reset. Separated by the Revolution, they were married in 1782, and remained in England for a year before moving back to Burgwyn's plantation, The Hermitage, near Wilmington, North Carolina in 1784. Caroline Eliza Clitherall Diaries, 1751-1860, Southern Historical Collection.

¹⁶⁵Journal of Elizabeth (Foote) Washington, summer 1784, pp. 6, 9. Washington Family Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁶⁶Fairfax Harrison, "With Braddock's Army: Mrs. Browne's Diary in Virginia and Maryland," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 32 (October 1924), 305-320. The expedition travelled from London to Fort Cumberland; met disaster on the Monongahela. Harrison published only those entries relating to Browne's travels in Virginia and Maryland.

Escorted by Mr. Cherrington, one of Braddock's subalterns, they stopped at a house for the night. "We supt," Browne began, "& desired to have 2 Beds but the Mistress of the house said she presumed we were man and Wife & that one would do. Mr. Cherr said it was true I was his Wife but it was very seldom that he was favoured with part of my Bed. She said she was sorry for it & at last complied." That such delicacy should be preserved after the sufferings Browne endured during her wilderness trek might seem absurd, but Cherrington played the charade to protect her reputation. Loss of female respectability was more fearsome than any hazard the Indians posed.¹⁶⁷

The second account was written by Elizabeth House Trist who left Philadelphia in the late fall of 1783 for Louisiana after receiving her "marching orders" from her husband, Nicholas Trist.¹⁶⁸ Like Browne, Trist faced hardships on her journey that would test her courage: crossings of ice-filled rivers threatened the travelers' lives more than once, and steep ascents and descents across the Alleghenies upon a horse which "trembled every step" convincing Trist to "prepare myself for the other world." In spite of the rugged realities of her travel, however, Trist maintained her sense of female decorum. Her delicacy that dictated that she "made it a rule to get up before day light that [she] might not see anybody nor they [her] dress," was not matched by the Pennsylvania backcountry women she met. One told her that it was customary for men and women to sleep in the same room; indeed, that was unavoidable in the many one-room homes in the region. "A Woman must be very insecure in herself that was afraid to

¹⁶⁷ Diary of Charlotte Browne, 1754-1757, 11 October 1755, unpaginated. Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁶⁸ Elizabeth House Trist was the grandmother of diplomat Nicholas Philip Trist who was a ward of Thomas Jefferson. Elizabeth House Trist diary, 1783-1784, (typescript) Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

sleep in the room with a strange man," she explained to Trist, "no man wou'd take a liberty with a woman unless he saw a disposition in her to encourage him."¹⁶⁹ Trist and her backcountry female host came from different worlds, a yawning chasm in economic and social ranks between them. On the surface it would appear that they had different ideas of female respectability as well: Trist would never have slept in the same room with a strange man, as the poorer woman would have. But even the non-elite woman subscribed to the notion of female modesty that the advice literature taught should be apparent in her face, her looks, and her manner, lest she be thought a wanton and court disaster.

Loss of reputation was ruinous for any woman. Reflecting upon the fall from virtue of an acquaintance, Mildred Smith of Yorktown moralized, "[s]he is indeed lost to every thing dear to Woman. Had she but kept in View the dignity of her Sex---"¹⁷⁰ The unspoken words firmly placed the responsibility for the unfortunate affair upon the woman, in a way Fordyce, Allestree, or Halifax would have approved. An unsullied reputation was the first prerequisite for a suitable marriage; indeed, Rachel Warrington, the subject of Mildred Smith's ruminations, married well beneath her station and was considered lucky under the circumstances. For some men, courtship was a considerably less serious business. North Carolinian Will Potter, writing to his friend Richard Bennehan in 1771, invited him to a wedding that was going to be the "Grandest that ever was known." Potter enticed Bennehan to accept with the promise that "there will be many Young Ladies there perhaps you may get a choice one as a Companion for Life."

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 9, 5.

¹⁷⁰ Letter, Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1780. Ambler Family Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

For his immediate future, a trip to New Bern, Potter daydreamed, "in two Hours [I] shall feast my Eyes upon those agreeable Virtuous young Ladies you so strongly Recommend and untill then I can't say any thing for them."¹⁷¹

For other men, the model of the virtuous woman dictated the mode of their address. Suppliant suitors wrote poetry or effusive letters to the object of their affections, begging for the smile that would signal the end to their torments. Frances Randolph, a respectable widow with three young sons, kept her suitor, St. George Tucker in suspense for months.¹⁷² "If every tender mark of the purest Love can inspire you with a reciprocal passion," he wrote to her early in 1778, "surely I can not fail in Time to make some Impression in your Heart - Think, my Fanny," he pleaded, "think what agonies must agitate my soul whilst I am writing to you thus."¹⁷³ She kept him squirming. On 15 January 1778 the most he could get from her was "compassion, [with] my only hopes founded on your Benevolence." She was still keeping him at arm's length in March. "It is impossible to give my dearest Fanny a more convincing proof of my implicit Regard to whatever she wishes, than my remaining three Days so near her without seeing her in obedience to her Request," he wrote barely containing his ardor, but, he warned, she

¹⁷¹Letter, Will Potter to Richard Bennehan, 6 March 1771, Cameron Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection. Bennehan was born in Richmond County, Virginia in 1743; in 1771, he was partner to merchant William Johnson in a store in Hillsborough, North Carolina.

¹⁷²Claudia Lamm Wood, "'With Unalterable Tenderness': The Courtship and Marriage of St. George Tucker and Frances Randolph Tucker" (MA Thesis, College of William and Mary, 1988), iv, 67.

¹⁷³St. George Tucker to Frances Randolph, undated. Coleman-Tucker Papers, College of William and Mary.

should not be surprised if his impulses should surmount his desire to obey her
"Commands."¹⁷⁴

As a wealthy widow, Frances Randolph had no reason to rush her consideration of Tucker's proposals. The entreating posture of the gentleman during courtship was just that: a pose. It was a choreographed ritual in which women knew power for a brief time in their lives, even if it was only the power of refusal. Why surrender too quickly? It was a heady experience for the very young; mature widows like Frances Randolph realized the serious consequences of their choice. Few women were fooled; the posturing ended with the wedding, "*the Important Crisis on which [their] Fate depend[ed].*"¹⁷⁵

Women wrote of weddings with a sense of meeting their fate, although not without optimism. While Anne Stuart wrote of Cornelia Lee's as "the event of which has fixed the fate of our amiable Cornelia," she hoped that the new bride would "look back and bless the day that saw her Mrs. Hopkins." Yet watching a sunset after the festivities, she reflected, "My Cornelia, may the evening of her Life be closed with like serenity." Had Cornelia begun the evening of her life on her wedding day?¹⁷⁶ Some months earlier, Stuart had written to Lee about the speculation surrounding a man whom, it was said by

¹⁷⁴St. George Tucker to Frances Randolph, 2 March 1778. Coleman-Tucker Papers. The couple married in September 1778.

¹⁷⁵Elizabeth Smith Shaw [sister of Abigail Adams] to her niece 'Nabby' Adams, 1786. Quoted in Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1980), 42.

¹⁷⁶Letter, Anne Calvert Stuart to Eliza Lee, 19 October 1806. Richard Bland Lee Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

an "undoubted authority" Stuart would take for her "Lord and Master."¹⁷⁷ It is impossible to determine how literally she took those words; they simmer with undercurrents of meaning in the context of a slave-holding society. But even in jest they convey an ambivalence, at best, about the married state. Ambivalence may well have characterized the wedding Frances Baylor Hill attended in 1797. The bride, she observed, "did not speak a word while she stood before the Parson."¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, a joyful Amarylis Ellis wrote to her sister Sally Attmore in 1792 that she had married "the man of my heart," and chuckled in her postscript that she had almost forgotten and signed her old name. When her husband wanted to see the letter she was writing, she refused!¹⁷⁹

When the enlightened writer in the *Gazette* urged a Virginia father to allow his daughter to make her own choice in marriage, he did so on the ground that she should be the sole disposer of her liberty.¹⁸⁰ The "Magic ring" that changed Cornelia Lee into Cornelia Hopkins also changed her from femme sole to femme covert. No matter how loving the marriage, women had a lively sense of the hazards and limitations of its 'protections.' The "liberty" she enjoyed before her marriage was constrained enough, to be sure; but under the veil of her husband's name, she had none at all. A legal nonentity, she had little recourse if her "Lord and Master" did not recognize his responsibilities to his dependent wife.

¹⁷⁷Letter, Anne Calvert Stuart to Eliza Lee, 29 June 1806. Richard Bland Lee Papers.

¹³⁶The Diary of Frances Baylor Hill of Hillsborough, March 1797., 20.

¹⁷⁹Letter, Amarylis Ellis to Sally Attmore, 3 November 1792, Attmore Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

¹⁸⁰*The Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, 14 July 1768, p. 1.

Conclusion

The letters that survive in today's archives represent women of wealth and position in early American society. They were proper women, who did not wish to have their virtue or respectability questioned. Sensitive to all the small vices attributed to their sex (vanity, love of gossip, and frivolity) as well as to the larger issues of inferiority in intellectual and emotional capacities, it behooved them to conform to convention. Even travels in an unforgiving wilderness did not relieve women of their sense of womanly decorum or psychological dependence upon men, no matter how well they withstood its tests. It was simply too great a risk. When James Clitherall, escorting Mrs. Arthur Middleton and Mrs. Edward Rutledge from South Carolina to join their husbands in Philadelphia, commented on a host's wife and daughters, his description of "a very charitable, motherly good woman and his Daughters [who] have made good use of the very few advantages in Education they have met with & behave very politely," encompassed all that was expected of respectable women in the eighteenth century.¹⁸¹

Edmund Randolph wrote a memorial of his wife Elizabeth Nicholas Randolph, paying tribute to her most notable qualities. "She won me by the best of all graces, cheerfulness, good sense, and benevolence," he recalled fondly of their courtship. In marriage, she was "an unchangeable and undiminished fund of delicacy . . . To subjects of indecency or indecorum, she was an absolute stranger and possessed with respect to them an infantine purity." In her decorum and childlike purity, she was a wife patterned after the model of Allestree and Halifax. Following their prescription further still, her virtue exerted a taming influence on her husband: "her words of affection warmed and subdued

¹⁸¹Diary, James Clitherall, 11 April 1776. Southern Historical Collection.

me . . . she explored and studied my temper, and anticipated the means of gratifying even my caprices," Randolph wrote gratefully.¹⁸² In a life devoted to her husband's interests, scrupulously observing the strictest codes of propriety, Elizabeth Randolph brought honor to her household and to her husband's name. "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband," a popular icon of eighteenth-century womanhood averred, 'virtue' being defined by mid-century English reforming writers, such as Richard Steele compiler of *The Ladies Library*, in "primarily sexual terms."¹⁸³ It was a moral well met in the life of Elizabeth Nicholas Randolph and of most women in eighteenth-century Virginia.

The availability of the printed word increased exponentially in the eighteenth century, but John Brewer's reminder that "the expansion of publishing in the eighteenth century increased the availability of traditional works and old forms as well as new types of literature," is as true for Virginia as the England he described. Studies of southern colonial libraries conclude that religious works figured prominently, from the smallest libraries that contained only a Bible, prayer book, and perhaps Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man* to the urbane William Byrd's collection of 174 books devoted to the subject. Equally applicable to the colonial south was Brewer's observation that "the change in reading practices was not from 'intensive' to 'extensive' reading, but to more varied reading, ranging from repeated and careful examination of some texts to the perfunctory

¹⁸² Edmund Randolph Memoir. Virginia Historical Society. Elizabeth Nicholas, born in 1753, was the daughter of Robert Carter Nicholas. She and Randolph married in August 1776.

¹⁸³ Isaac Watt, "The New Woman: Samuel Richardson's Pamela," in *The Family: Its Structure and Functions*, ed., Rose L. Coser (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), 281-82.

perusal of others.”¹⁸⁴ Byrd’s daily reading of Greek, Latin or Hebrew, and Sunday readings of Tillotson and other Anglican sermon writers attests to the repeated examination of some texts, while his reading Milton in Latin, rather than in the English in which it was written, shows his more perfunctory use of others.¹⁸⁵

Similarly, women’s reading became more varied, although the ways in which books were bequeathed to women indicate that the deviser expected the gifts to be read repeatedly and cherished. Edward Moseley devised only religious works out of his library for his daughter; Sarah Allen did not want books loaned out in case they were not returned and the “Sets” permanently broken up. Elizabeth Foote Washington’s books were too big to carry about with her during the day, so she “wrote some small manuscripts that I can conveniently carry in my pocket to peruse occasionally, - which I have receiv’d great comfort from.”¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless women’s reading was expanding also as they too tapped into English literary culture. Women read the *Spectator*, a bastion of polite coffee-house conversation.¹⁸⁷ It was no accident that Eliza Haywood named her short-lived periodical *The Female Spectator*, banking on its namesake’s popularity with

¹⁸⁴ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997), 172, 170-71.

¹⁸⁵ Hayes, *Library of William Byrd*, 46. Hayes suggests that Byrd’s choice to read *Paradise Lost* in Latin rather than its original English “seems to be more of an intellectual exercise than anything else.”

¹⁸⁶ Elizabeth Foote Washington Diary, 29.

¹⁸⁷ David Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British North America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). The English coffeehouse was a male bastion of talk, one feature of which “was its obsession with news,” Shields explained. That conversation spilled over into periodicals such as *The Spectator*, *The Idler*, *The Rambler*, and *The Tatler*. These journals gave a forum to the writings of men who were schooled “in a discourse of civility [that] was renovated from its courtly exclusivity to something more demotic and applicable to the world at large,” 20-22.

women. Recall, too, the Virginian attempt to emulate the writers of the *Spectator* in the *Gazette*'s 'Monitor' and the many short pieces in colonial newspapers that have been traced to their English journal origins.

But John Brewer's point remains crucial, particularly for the eighteenth-century south: the increased availability of print, combined with the modest increase in female literacy, only strengthened and widened the influence of traditional advice literature.¹⁸⁸ Richard D. Brown concluded in his study of nineteenth-century reader Lucy Breckinridge that the authors she read, primarily Englishmen, "reinforced American conventions" of gender roles.¹⁸⁹ This was precisely the case for many women of the colonial South. "Britain led in discussions of female character and place [in the eighteenth century]," Nancy Cott has said, "setting sex-role conventions for the literate audience."¹⁹⁰ But lacking the physical freedom of British urban centers or the intellectual encouragement of literary salons of London or Philadelphia, to challenge or even discuss those conventions, southern women conformed to many of the teachings of traditional advice literature.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Kenneth Lockridge makes this point for the American colonial period in Virginia in *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Enquiry into the Social Contest of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974), 83-101. Keith Wrightson came to a similar finding for literacy and society in early modern England in *English Society 1580-1680* (1982; reprint New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 183-199.

¹⁸⁹ Brown, *Knowledge is Power*, 175.

¹⁹⁰ Nancy Cott, "Passionless: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Signs* 4 (1978), 223.

¹⁹¹ Englishmen have always looked askance at all things French; this was true particularly of the freedoms they saw French women take in Parisian salons. "The minority of Frenchwomen who had acquired pretensions to intellectual autonomy," Linda Colley found, were excoriated by the conservative evangelical Thomas Gisborne as the "least eligible of wives." Colley, *Britons*, 251. The backlash to the rise of salons in England is

The rigid controls over all inferiors, from white women to slaves, strengthened further still southern ideas of patriarchy. Challenges to the authority of the male head of household were an affront to his honor, whether they emanated from his slave or from his wife. So important was the patriarchal ideal that it even triumphed over religion: when a Virginia Anglican wife protested that her Quaker husband was raising their children as Quakers, the court upheld the husband.¹⁹² It was true that essays appearing in the *Virginia Gazette* by the end of the colonial period followed the newer advice writings of James Fordyce and John Gregory, urging men to look beyond a woman's looks to her mind in evaluating her potential as a wife and mother. Yet elite women in the South remained essentially decorative props to the status of their gentlemen husbands, the literature merely draping the hard reality of the message in a softer garb.¹⁹³ For as Gerda Lerner has pointed out, the price that women paid for an intellectual life was the

a good indicator of the helplessness of conservatives to suppress them. David Shields has described a culture of sociability in the colonial America; however, with the notable exception of the male "Tuesday Club" of Annapolis, Maryland, it remained a northern phenomenon. The most prominent women included Elizabeth Magawley of Philadelphia in the 1730s and Elizabeth Graeme a generation later, also in Philadelphia. David Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters*, 99-104, 120-140. Shields himself contrasts the northern culture of sociability with Virginia's. Virginia and Carolina planters developed a social life built around entertaining guests. The result was hospitality, not sociability: "Whereas sociability promoted the free and friendly conversation of persons meeting in public space, hospitality organized social exchange under the auspices of a family in its household. Whatever hierarchy of authority governed the family was reinforced by a hierarchy among host and guests based on property," 301. The point is a crucial one for the place of southern women in both the hierarchy and the resulting exchanges of conversation.

¹⁹² Edmund Morgan, *Virginians at Home: Family Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Williamsburg, Virginia: Colonial Williamsburg, 1952), 45.

¹⁹³ Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches & Anxious Patriarchs*, 250; Margaret Ripley Wolfe, *Daughters of Canaan: A Sage of Southern Women* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 42-43.

deprivation of a man's love, and spinsterhood was an estate to be feared.¹⁹⁴ Custom and the law kept women dependent upon men, but it was infinitely preferable to rely upon a husband for one's support, than a father or brother: a married woman had the double satisfaction of fulfilling her female function and being mistress of her household. To challenge conventional gender roles risked loss of respectability, one's livelihood, one's female nature. Within the southern slave society, dependent upon male protection and provision, the women discussed in this chapter simply realized the risk was too high.

Yet even as the traditional advice strengthened its influence, it faced a new challenge: the novel. The first American novel would not appear until the end of the century, but the rise of novels in England would be felt in the American colonies as early as the 1740s. Unlike all the works of history, philosophy, religion, and science that filled colonial libraries, novels featured women as main characters and their popularity with women readers in particular soared. Novels offered women different ways to think about themselves and their choices; the library of Lady Jean Skipwith, assembled between the 1780s and 1826, attests to the new meanings such books would have for women. By Skipwith's death in 1826, novels, poetry, and drama titles numbered 197 out of the 384 we know she owned; of religious works she owned but six.¹⁹⁵ The tremendous influence of novels that wrought such change is the next subject to consider.

¹⁹⁴ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 226.

¹⁹⁵ Abraham, "Library of Lady Jean Skipwith," 310-11.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROLE OF THE NOVEL IN ENGLAND AND THE EARLY AMERICAN SOUTH

“Began a very clever Novel – *Evelina* it was call’d,” Frances Baylor Hill recorded on a late October day in 1797. She had spent most of the previous week looking after a household of sick children, her nursing chores interspersed with sewing projects. She was ready for the diversion of a good read and more than willing to slight her needlework. “Knit a short piece,” she explained, “for I was reading the best part of the day.” *Evelina* (1778) had claimed her; she finished the first volume in three days.¹ In mid-November, she picked up volume two, finished it in four days, and immediately began volume three. Her perpetual sewing duties, company, and a funeral slowed her reading of the last volume. Still she stole time every day (but two) from the nineteenth until the twenty-eighth when she noted triumphantly, “I finish’d reading *Evelina* it is a very good Novel and very entertaining.”²

By the end of the eighteenth century, the novel as a genre was firmly planted on American soil and had taken root. William Hill Brown had published *The Power of*

¹ Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, a young lady’s entrance into the world*. London 1778.

² Diary of Frances Baylor Hill of Hillsborough, King and Queen County, VA (1797), ed. William K. Bottorff and Roy C. Flannagan. *Early American Literature* Winter 1967, 45, 48.

Sympathy, regarded as the first American novel, in 1789³ but English novels had permeated the colonial literary scene decades earlier. Frances Baylor Hill's absorption in *Evelina* is characteristic of novels' appeal to female readers, whether they read in England, New England, or the eighteenth-century south. Featuring women at the center of dramatic plots that turned upon disguise and deceit, seduction and betrayal, rebellion and reconciliation, the novel delivered moral lessons in a style unmatched by traditional advice. Frances Baylor Hill dutifully read [James] Blair's *Sermons* (1740) when she could not get to church; regarded Dr. John Gregory's *Legacy to his Daughters* (1774) "a very good Book;" and regularly read "letters on education."⁴ But none of them captivated her as her novels did. Her reading exemplified both the coexistence of devotional, traditional, and educational works, and the persistence of that literature as the canon of female education late in the century. The addition of novels, however, is a telling portent of the change observed in Lady Jean Skipwith's library by 1825, in which novels would supplant traditional advice. Novels never dominated eighteenth-century southern reading, but their presence in southern libraries merits attention for their

³ Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 83-101. The question of "first" is a matter of definition, Davidson points out, of the term 'novel' rather than of 'first.' Other contenders include Charlotte Ramsay Lennox's *The Life of Harriot Stuart* (1751) and Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Philip Freneau's *Father Bombo's Pilgrimage to Mecca* (1770; first published 1975), 84.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 45, 16-18. The other books cited are James Blair, *Our Savior's divine Sermon on the Mount. . . explained: and the practice of it recommended in divers sermons and discourses* (London, 1740) and John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (London, 1774; reprinted at least twenty-three times before 1877). "Letters on Education" probably was Catherine Macaulay's work, written and published in London in 1790; Hill did not specify an author or comment further.

influence can be detected in the ways that women thought about female virtue, friendship, and identity.⁵

Traditionally, attempts to locate the origin of the novel have begun with the great triumvirate of English writers Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding. Ian Watt's venerable study, *The Rise of the Novel*, defined the novel and linked its rise to the society in which it was generated. For Watt, the novel was distinctive from previous literature in several ways: in its formal realism, which "portray[ed] all the varieties of human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective;" in its emphasis on the primacy of individual experience; and in its attention to particularizing detail that rejected the medieval universal world view for that of the individual subject's.⁶ Defoe and Richardson broke with past literary tradition in a narrative style that used words, "whatever the cost in repetition or parenthesis or verbosity," to convey the immediacy of their subjects.⁷ The goal, of course, was to tell a story with such unity of design and attention to detail that its authenticity could not be doubted.

The novel was also a middle-class phenomenon. Critical of the excessive moral lapses of the aristocracy (who had leisure for that sort of thing), priced affordably, and written by men of middling status who knew their class, novels appealed to a reading

⁵ Individual responses to the novel as advice literature form the subject of the following chapter.

⁶ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 11, 13, 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

public that continually broadened during the course of the eighteenth century.⁸ Even servants read, especially those in upper-class households where fiction was consumed, and embraced the adventures of Richardson's Pamela, who also was a servant.⁹ All these distinguishing features of the novel were met in the works of Samuel Richardson, Watt's founding father of the novel, marking the decade of the 1740s as the birth of the genre.

Watt's analysis remains the starting point of most work on the origins of the novel, but the vulnerability of his arguments has been exposed most notably by Michael McKeon. The novel's attempts at realism and authenticity notwithstanding, McKeon argued, there remained elements of romance - as opposed to historical truth- even in the work of Watt's founding fathers. Further, there were many other eighteenth-century works that McKeon insisted "must surely be associated with the anti-individualist and idealizing tradition of romance." McKeon also questioned Watt's position on the dominance of the middle class in eighteenth-century England. How does one account for the persistence of the aristocracy throughout the century? Fielding, McKeon pointed out, wrote novels that McKeon described as "enmeshed in the romance tradition," that is, they supported the traditional values that marked the aristocracy.¹⁰ Furthermore, Watt

⁸ Ibid., 34, 41, 58-9.

⁹ Ibid., 47, 148.

¹⁰ Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1987), 1-4. Romances were understood to be completely fantasy, telling stories about vastly improbable acts and characters, in far away places and times. The novel is distinguished from romance by its realism. Ros Ballaster, "Romancing the Novel: Gender and Genre in Early Theories of Narrative," in Spender, ed., *Living by the Pen*, 188-200.

does not account for the argument that individualism appeared in England as early as the thirteenth century.¹¹

Better to see the novel more abstractly, McKeon believed, as a mediator of change, a “deceptively monolithic category that encloses a complex historical process.” That process was a redefinition of how truth and virtue were defined. In 1600, truth about nature and the cosmos derived from received authorities; such authority was challenged late in the century by the empirical methods of the scientific revolution. By the eighteenth century, disillusionment with both approaches to truth had set in, as confidence even in the absolutes of science began to be seen as naïve. No work of truth could be completely free of romantic idealism, this third approach asserted. Similarly, ideas of virtue, once associated almost exclusively with an aristocratic birthright, were reconfigured as the aristocracy’s claim to pre-eminence and legitimacy to rule were challenged by a middle class that equated legitimacy with merit. Recognizing the widening separation in world views in identifying truth and virtue, the novel set forth these issues and explained them, addressing particularly the question of “how truth and virtue are most authentically signified.”¹²

Recognizing that the literary and social origins of the novel had long and deep roots beyond eighteenth-century England was an important step. But McKeon and Watt

¹¹ This argument was made in Alan MacFarlane’s *The Origins of English Individualism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

¹² McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 20. And the ways in which truth and virtue are ‘most authentically signified,’ through fact or imagination, becomes a critical point. The distinction between the realism of novels and the imagination of romances becomes a gendered one, Ros Ballaster makes clear, as the former are associated with men and the latter with women. Ros Ballaster, “Romancing the Novel: Gender and Genre in Early Theories of Narrative,” in Dale Spender, ed., *Living By the Pen: Early British Women Writers* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 188-200.

had overlooked an important phenomenon in the rise of the novel: the role of women writers in popularizing the genre.¹³ English women had been appearing in print since the seventeenth century in numbers that showed a remarkable increase after the English Civil War.¹⁴ These writings covered a spectrum of subjects, from the expected housewifery, maternal, and midwifery advice, to poetry, drama, and polemical essays on politics, marriage, and women's education.¹⁵ Some women wrote to counter misogynistic writings of men, such as the four women who replied to Joseph Swetman's 1615 tract, *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women; or the Vanity of Them, Choose You Whether. With a Commendation of Wise, Virtuous, and Honest Women*.¹⁶ Others wrote for pleasure, as did noblewoman Katherine Philips (1631-1664), the famous 'Orinda,' whose gentry husband supported her writing. Most, however, wrote

¹³ An important corrective is Dale Spender's *Mothers of the Novel: 100 good women writers before Jane Austen* (London: Pandora, 1986).

¹⁴ James Fitzmaurice, General Editor and Josephine A. Roberts, Textual Editor, *Major Women Writers of Seventeenth-Century England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997). Patricia Crawford's presentation in graph form of this information appears on page 3. Women's publishing before 1640 was practically nil; it rose to over one hundred editions in the 1650s and 1660s; dipped to half that in the 1670s and rose again to 120 editions by 1700.

¹⁵ Examples of these essays include Elinor James's *Advice to the Citizens of London* (1688), Mary Astell's *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700) and her *Serious Proposals to the Ladies* (1694), and Bathsua Makin's *An Essay to Revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673).

¹⁶ Extracts quoted in Angeline Goreau, *Whole Duty of Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Garden City, N.Y.: Dial Press, 1985), 69-74. The women respondents included a well-meaning but not well-educated young daughter of a minister, Rachel Speght, and three others who wrote under pseudonyms. An anonymous writer, sex unspecified, wrote a play called *Swetman, the Woman-hater, Arraigned by Women* in 1620. Swetman's tract was not unpopular, however; it went through ten editions between 1615 and 1634.

to support themselves and their families, their very lives contradicting directly the notion of the frivolity of women's writing.¹⁷ Seventeenth-century writer Aphra Behn wrote herself out of debtors' prison, for example, and in the eighteenth century, writer Eliza Haywood was a single parent of two children and Charlotte Lennox died destitute, in spite of her literary successes.¹⁸

Most published women's work of the late seventeenth century was imaginative literature. As Ruth Perry observed, "they had not formerly trespassed on the more 'serious' intellectual territory men had traditionally occupied (philosophy, theology, history, and political commentary.)"¹⁹ And, for the most part, women's writings were in the form of letters. With the development of a post office in Britain in 1660 and the "penny post" in 1680, women had the means to reach beyond their limited geographic boundaries, maintaining connections with friends and relatives. Dale Spender has pointed out that letter writing also allowed a construction of self that was "worthy of esteem." In these centuries of British colonial expansion, a woman correspondent could easily imagine a cluster of people gathered about her letter. In those letters, Spender notes, "it is not difficult to detect yet another influence working to transform the letter

¹⁷ Women also made a living as printers, particularly in the Civil War years when censorship was relaxed. The number of women printers declined drastically in the eighteenth century and were practically non-existent by the mid-nineteenth century. See Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760, A Social History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 175-76; Margaret Hunt, "Hawkers, Bawlers, and Mercuries: Women and the London Press in the Early Enlightenment," in *Women and the Enlightenment*, eds., Margaret Hunt, Margaret Jacob, Phyllis Mack and Ruth Perry, (New York: Institute for Research in History and Haworth Press, 1984), 41-68.

¹⁸ Spender, *Living By the Pen*, 17.

¹⁹ Ruth Perry, "Mary Astell's Response to the Enlightenment," in *Women and the Enlightenment*, 35.

into the epistolary novel," either in its gloss over dangers or its supply of entertaining stories.²⁰ Indeed, the publication of private letters became popular fare, although it is not always clear whether they were published against a woman's wishes (in spite of her fruitless attempts to retain her feminine modesty) or in accordance with them. Other women, such as Margaret Cavendish, published "letters" she had written between fictional correspondents, fully intending publication.²¹ In any event, it was a logical development that women who had perfected their letter-writing skills should turn their talents to the epistolary novel.

Heidi Hutner has argued that Aphra Behn was Britain's first novelist.²² Whether the search for that designation serves any literary or historical purpose, the fact that Behn is a contender makes the important point that women were writing novels by the early eighteenth century. Janet Todd divided her study of women fiction writers into three parts that corresponded to her analysis of the three stages in English women's writing

²⁰ Spender, *Living by the Pen*, 6.

²¹ Fitzmaurice, *Major Women Writers*, 151-52. Cavendish (the Duchess of Newcastle) used her *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664) as a forum to voice her opinions on gender relations, particularly in marriage.

²² Heidi Hutner, "Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: The Politics of Gender, Race, and Class," in Spender, ed., *Living by the Pen*, 42. Others have made this argument, including Angeline Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* (Garden City, N.Y.: Dial Press, 1980); Judith Kegan Gardiner, "The First English Novel: Aphra Behn, the Canon, and Women's Tastes," *Tulsa Studies* 8 (1989), 201-222; Moira Ferguson, *First Feminists: British Women Writers 1578-1799* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 143. There are other contenders, of course. See Dale Spender's discussion of Lady Mary Wroath's *The Countesse of Montgomeries Urania* (1621) in *Mothers of the Novel*, 16-22. Wroath was a niece of poet Sir Philip Sidney. Michael McKeon argues that in the complexity of the development of the genre, "there is little sense in seeking the identity of 'the first novelist.' The novels he used to test his thesis of the rise of the novel as a way to discuss truth and virtue, however, were all written by men: *Don Quixote*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Gulliver's Travels*. McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 267.

between the Restoration period and 1800. From the late seventeenth century into the early eighteenth, women wrote “with considerable frankness” and, perhaps as a result, “the status of female fiction remained dubious.” Delariviere Manley’s *New Atalantis* (1709), for example, depicts young Astrea who has returned to earth to see if men have improved in her absence; escorted by her mother, Lady Virtue (who is clothed in tattered rags), Astrea finds all too numerous examples (described in detail) of male cruelty, deceit, and corruption.²³ Manley excoriates the double standard in stark language. By mid-century, women writers forsook the issue of sexless minds and souls and embraced sentiment as peculiarly feminine, acquiring the respectability as writers their forebears did not have (although at the cost of accepting their ‘limitations’).²⁴ Elizabeth Singer Rowe was admired as much for the blameless life she led as for her *Friendship in Death: in Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728), a novel about the dire consequences of a sinful life and the rewards of a virtuous one.²⁵ During the 1780s and 1790s, Todd says, some writers bristled at the restrictions upon female respectability while others embraced them.²⁶ The writings of Mary Wollstonecraft exemplify the

²³ Mary de la Riviere Manley. *Secret memoirs and manners of several persons of quality, of both sexes. From the New Atalantis, an island in the Mediteranean* (London, 1709).

²⁴ Hilda Smith describes this process well in *Reason’s Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

²⁵ John J. Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 239-248. Richetti notes that ghosts in Rowe’s narratives are only “one instance of the lingering and almost desperate hope of an age more and more dominated by scientific positivism for palpable proof of the old mysteries,” a point that supports well McKeon’s characterization of the dilemmas of late eighteenth-century novelists as they sought ways to properly denote truth and virtue.

²⁶ Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 3. Catherine Craft-Fairchild traces these

former; the respectable novels of Fanny Burney, such as *Evelina* that edified and did not contain the offensively frank language of earlier novels, exemplify the latter.

Women's writings before the publication of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) show that indeed the novel's life predated that eminent publication. Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1668), and Eliza Haywood's novels are examples of Todd's first stage.²⁷ Their novels introduced the female rake, the feminine counterpart of the male rogues, who threw off the restrictions of their sex, indeed, who enjoyed amorous adventures with many men, but who in the end were punished either by exile or death. Yet, in spite of their endings, these are not the traditional stories of crime and punishment for violations of female virtue; instead, they insist upon the explicit treatment of women's sexuality, as Catherine Craft-Fairchild noted, "equating hero and heroine by creating improbable female rakes." But, she continued, neither are these novels completely subversive of the gender order either, for by turning women into 'rakes,' they continue to "privilege man as the norm . . . leav[ing] the foundational terms of representation intact."²⁸

developments in women writers' use of the masquerade in their novels in *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century Fictions by Women* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993). Janet Spencer's *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) also distinguishes between early writers such as Behn and Eliza Haywood who see men as antagonists, and later writers such as Frances Burney who wrote acceptable and respectable sentimental novels.

²⁷ Behn's *Oroonoko* was the fascinating result of her brief stay in British Surinam during which she observed the slave trade and slave culture. Her treatment of slaves in this novel, Heidi Hutner says, "can be extended, in Behn's vision, to the treatment of white women as slaves in the seventeenth century." Imoinda, the heroine, although powerless in the face of patriarchal and social constraints, freely gave herself to Oroonoko who vowed "she shou'd be the only Woman he wou'd possess while he liv'd." Hutner, "Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," 42, 44.

²⁸ Craft-Fairchild, *Masquerade and Gender*, 21, 11.

By mid-century, with the political turmoil of the seventeenth century behind, England settled down to a gendered social hierarchy that was firmly in place. Feminine domesticity acquired the patina of a secular sainthood: conduct literature such as Fordyce's *Sermons* infused practical advice with sentiment, idealizing courtship and marriage. At the same time, however, the Marriage Act of 1753 tightened loose marriage laws (persons under twenty-one years of age had to have parental consent) and William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* stressed the legal inequality of men and women within marriage. Novels written in this period, suffused with sentiment, do not so much protest these inequities as advise how best to endure them. As Lady Pennington wrote in her *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters* (1761), "Should the painful task of dealing with a morose tyrannical temper be assigned to you, there is little more to be recommended than a patient submission to an evil which admits not of a remedy."²⁹ While a fall from grace in earlier novels was punished by physical death or exile, the sentimental novels of mid-century administered a punishment to the soul, a black despair born of the fallen heroine's abandonment (whether intentional or not) of all that was virtuous and good.³⁰ These novels retold the story of Eve all over again, as Sarah Emily Newton has said, "the woman who begins in innocence and ends in experience; the woman, who knowing the rules of the Garden, takes the forbidden fruit."³¹

²⁹ Quoted in Todd, *The Sign of Angellica*, 112.

³⁰ Todd, *The Sign of Angellica*, 93. For a fuller description of the English political and social context of the novel at mid-century see "The Mid-Eighteenth Century: Sentiment and Sincerity," in *ibid.*, 101-124.

³¹ Sarah Emily Newton, "Wise and Foolish Virgins: 'Usable Fiction' and the Early American Conduct Tradition," *Early American Literature* 25 (1990), 157.

Despite the sentimental novel's acceptance of rigid gender conventions, however, Catherine Craft-Fairchild saw that, in its own way, it was as critical of (and perhaps more persuasive against) patriarchal oppression than the more overt protests of the Restoration period. Tyrannical fathers, rather than aggressive suitors, became targets for mid-century novelists' pens; women writers 'feminized' their heroes, endowing them with emotional sensibilities that made them as vulnerable as women. "Putting men into the powerless position of women," Craft-Fairchild perceptively observed, "and showing them sharing in the misery entailed by the law of the father," was a device that enabled male readers to imagine the life of the 'other.'³²

Perhaps it was a horrified reaction to the French Revolution, which demonstrated so dramatically the results of excess of emotion and radical notions about gender roles, that persuaded English writers and readers that prudence dictated the reins be drawn in. The decade of 1790s was a complex of a rediscovery of feminists strands of thought as in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, for example, and a resignation to the world as it was, as in Fanny Burney's *Camilla* (1796).³³ Born of bitter experience, novels of the late century did not drip with sentiment; they did not even advocate filial obedience to parents. Instead, they advocated prudence and common sense in making marriage choices: of *Camilla* for example, Janet Todd said, "it is clear that money –and the control of it—is the issue." Frances Burney could well see, in the

³² Craft-Fairchild, *Masquerade and Gender*, 21.

³³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (London, 1792); Frances Burney, *Camilla* (London, 1796).

distinction between sentiment and cold reality, that fiction could not prepare young girls for this practical new world.³⁴

By 1800, the unconventional conduct of their lives had thoroughly discredited the work of writers such as Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay, whose *Letters on Education* (1790) had condemned the double standard.³⁵ Other English writers linked their radicalism to that of the French Revolution, and took pains to distance themselves from it. Rather than protest, the aim of late eighteenth-century novels would be to find ways in which women could make their situation bearable. Commenting upon the world as they found it, women novelists appropriated a moral authority in their writing, teaching their readers rather than amusing them, insisting all the while that they were *not* writing novels.

This brief review of the changing ideas within the novel from 1680 to 1800 is necessary to keep from viewing the eighteenth-century novel as monolithic in style, content, and message. But from the Restoration novels' frank upset of gender roles, through the mid-century accommodation, to the late century's re-accommodation, several common threads are visible. The most obvious is that novels featured women as main characters. The novel emphasized relationships between women and their men --fathers, suitors, or husbands-- that were central to their lives.³⁶ The ways in which these

³⁴ Todd, *The Sign of Angellica*, 278, 280.

³⁵ In their advocacy for women's education, both Wollstonecraft and Macaulay argued that women's physical weakness, relative to men's, was no bar to educating their minds. In this, they directly engaged the arguments of John Milton, Jonathan Swift, Jean Jacques Rousseau, James Fordyce, and John Gregory. Felicity Nussbaum, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660-1750* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 165.

³⁶ Spender, ed., *Living By the Pen*, 15.

relationships were portrayed differed throughout the century as writers' thinking changed about questions of virtue, an increasingly relevant issue for women as the term was being redefined from a political sense to a sexual one. The early novels experimented with flouting gender conventions; mid-century novels accepted feminine sentiment as a quasi-religious dictum; late novels simply tried to find a way to invest feminine sentiment with religious and moral authority. All exposed the inequities of gender relations as hardened by custom and institutionalized by law, and sought ways in which women might cope.

The novel also contradicted the traditional advice literature's image of women in other ways as well. While Halifax's *Lady's New Year's Gift* had advised women to overlook their husbands' infidelity, for example, women's novels universally condemned it. Nor did all critiques of male sexual codes of conduct come from women; Samuel Richardson's rake, Lovelace (pronounced Love-less), in *Clarissa* excited pity rather than envy as his amorous adventures lost him the love of a virtuous woman. Furthermore, in their depiction of intelligent women, novels subverted the tenets of traditional advice that prescribed unquestioning female submission to superior male intellectual prowess. These heroines had to be treated seriously in their own right, rather than as mere appendages to men.³⁷

It is important, then, to see the novels, short stories, and serials (especially by women writers) that warned against the dangers of the world to which innocent women so often fell victim as advice literature in its own right. They warned against the dangers of the world to which women, educated to be innocent, fell prey. Eliza Haywood's

³⁷Elizabeth Bergen Brophy, *Women's Lives and the 18th-Century English Novel* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991), 39-40.

Female Spectator, a periodical published in England between 1744 and 1746, was a prime example of this “conduct fiction.”³⁸ Haywood’s stories always contained a moral: “Marituius and Ismenia,” for example, warned against relying upon the honor of men to preserve feminine virtue and dignity, avoiding the fate of the helplessly innocent “Erminia,” the naïve dupe of a rogue disguised as her brother.³⁹ Haywood’s stories subverted traditional advice as they portrayed men as unreliable protectors, forcing women to assume responsibility for their own reputation and virtue.

The coexistence of all the various strands of advice literature is indicative of the complexity of the change in thinking about the construction of femininity. Indeed, the very coexistence is instructive: rather than a neat linear progression over the course of the century, we see instead some writers who strained in different ways against the dominant culture, others who found ways to make the most of the virtues allocated to women, and still others who resisted mightily any change at all. Images of women did not replace one another, Felicity Nussbaum has pointed out; they coexisted.⁴⁰ This complexity was evident even in the short diary of Frances Baylor Hill, with whom this chapter opened. Hill read Catherine Macaulay’s *Letters on Education* (1790), which

³⁸ Sarah Emily Newton notes the need for a definition of the term “conduct” when discussing this genre. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, conduct literature can range from the conduct-of-life type such as *The Ladies Calling* to etiquette and fashion manuals. This study does not deal with the latter definition, but rather that which addressed serious issues of the feminine nature, roles in life, and women’s responsibilities. Sarah Emily Newton, “Wise and Foolish Virgins: ‘Usable Fiction’ and the Early American Conduct Tradition.” *Early American Literature* 25 (1990), 161-62.

³⁹ Mary Priestley, ed., *The Female Spectator, Being selections from Mrs. Eliza Haywood’s [sic] periodical (1744-1746)* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., 1929).

⁴⁰ Nussbaum, *Brink of All We Hate*, 161.

contains a well-known passage urging that chastity be an ideal for both men and women, as well as Frances Burney's *Evelina*, a classic example of sentimental literature.⁴¹

Hill maintained her diary at the century's end, but the novel had arrived in eighteenth-century America long before the first American novel was written. The same trans-Atlantic currents that had brought traditional advice literature to American shores brought novels as well. Early settlers brought treasured books with them: Matthew Hubbard of York County, whose will was probated in 1670, owned *Astrea: A French Romance*.⁴² Arthur Spicer of Richmond County, who died in 1699, owned some fiction, including Lady Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621).⁴³

Most inventories, however, did not itemize books, even when noting the larger libraries of wealthy colonists.⁴⁴ Searches for novels are frustrated by brief references such as Elizabeth Banks of Northumberland County who left "28 books" in 1720, Mary Swan of Lancaster County who owned "32 old books, [valued at] 15 sh[illings]" in 1724,

⁴¹ Catherine Macaulay, *Letters on Education*. She argued that "the great difference now beheld in the external consequences which follow the deviations from chastity in the two sexes, did in all probability arise from the women having been considered as the mere property of the men;... that policy adopted this difference, when the plea of property had been given up; and it was still preserved in society from the unruly licentiousness of the men, who . . . by mutual support and general opinion [continue] to use their natural freedom with impunity." Quoted in Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 150. Janet Todd also quotes this well-known passage in *Sign of Angellica*, 208.

⁴² "Books in Colonial Virginia," *Virginia Historical Magazine*, 10 (1903), 403.

⁴³ Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South* vol. 2 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 509.

⁴⁴ This is a common complaint of anyone who has tried to study this subject in the south. See Julia Cherry Spruill, "The Southern Lady's Library 1700-1776," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 34 (1935), 38; Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*, vol. 2, 498-500. "Inventories of books for many counties of these seaboard colonies simply do not exist," Davis discovered. Many were lost during the course of wars and in accidental fires.

and Barbara Tayloe's modest collection of "3 Bibles and a parcel of old books" in 1726.⁴⁵ The inventory of Hannah Lee Corbin's estate is exceptional in its listing of several of her novels: *The History of a Young Lady of Distinction* (1754), *The History of Charlotte Summers* (1750), *The Fortunate Country Maid* (1741), and *Country Cousins* (1767).⁴⁶ Receipts from her London agents supplement the list with *The Rival Mother* (1755) and *True Merit True Happiness* (1757), which were shipped in October 1766 and *Vicar of Boray*, *The History of Mrs. Somerville*, and *The Curate of Coventry* (1771), shipped in June 1772.⁴⁷ Frances Baylor Hill read *Louisa the Lovely Orphan* and *Mrs. Montague's Letters* (an account of her travels in Turkey rather than a novel) in addition to *Evelina*.⁴⁸ Rosalie Calvert of Maryland frequented Annapolis bookstores and wrote in 1796 that she "was up to her eyes in romances—at the moment I have eleven in the house." Even so, on the same day, she complained to her brother that her mother had

⁴⁵ "Books in Colonial Virginia," *Virginia Historical Magazine* 10 (1903), 401.

⁴⁶ Inventory, Hannah Lee Corbin, 21 October 1782 and 13 January 1783. Peckatone Papers, Virginia Historical Society. The full titles are *The History of a Young Lady of Distinction. In a Series of Letters* (London, 1754); *The History of Charlotte Summers, The Fortunate Parish Girl*. In Two volumes. (London, 1750); Charles de Fieux Mouhy, *The Fortunate Country Maid. Being the entertaining memoirs of the present celebrated Marchioness of L.V. who from a cottage . . . Became a lady of the first quality in the court of France* (Dublin, 1741); *The country cousins: or, a journey to London* (London, 1767).

⁴⁷ Receipt from Nathaniel Young, Bookseller in London, 21 October 1766 and from T. Cadell, London, 19 June 1772. Peckatone Papers, VHS. George Smart noted that books were rarely itemized, even in estates of wealthy people. Smart, "Private Libraries in Colonial Virginia," 28 fn. 15. The incompleteness of Corbin's inventory is suggested by the additional titles in her accounts. The full titles are *The Rival Mother: or, the history of the Countess De Salens, and her two daughters* (London, 1755); *True Merit, True Happiness; Exemplified in the Entertaining and Instructive Memoirs of Mr. S--*. (London, 1757); *The Curate of Coventry: a tale* (London, 1771).

⁴⁸ *Diary of Frances Baylor Hill*, 45, 50.

appropriated a novel she was reading and would not put it down, even on Sunday.

Calvert's Belgian-emigre mother was reading the novel, she said, not "for the pleasure of the very tender English amours, but in order to learn English."⁴⁹

No novels appear in the diary of Catherine Fullerton of Charles Town, but she did note in her diary that *Doctor Moore's Travels* "had afforded [her] infinite amusement lately." He wrote in the "most easy, elegant style that can be imagined, relates a variety of Anecdotes of several illustrious characters, and makes some of the best observations on Men & Manners that ever I read," she concluded.⁵⁰ For less adventurous readers like Catherine Fullerton, travel accounts (the versimilitude of which are doubtful) offered a safer, more acceptable form of fiction; geography was certainly a respectable interest for young ladies.

Novels appear in the inventories and catalogues of men's libraries in the south, as well, but those written by women rarely do. Instead, the novels of Samuel Richardson, particularly *Pamela* and *Clarissa* (1748), Laurence Sterne (*Tristram Shandy* (1760) is truly ubiquitous), Tobias Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), and Henry Fielding (*Tom Jones* (1749) was much more in evidence than *Moll Flanders* (1722) predominated. Richard Beale Davis's survey of libraries in Virginia shows men who collected books on a wide variety of subjects. But libraries full of history, natural science, religion, government, law, philosophy, and the classics, usually had at least one of the above

⁴⁹Quoted in Margaret Law Callcott, ed., *Mistress of Riverdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert 1795-1821* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 9. The quotations are from letters written 8 January 1796. The original letters are in the Charles J. Stier Papers, Baron Henry de Witte Archives, Antwerp. Unfortunately, Callcott did not provide full transcriptions in her book.

novels. For the most part belletristic books are more numerous, however, with Alexander Pope, John Milton, Jonathan Swift, John Dryden, William Shakespeare, and Geoffrey Chaucer the most popular. Of the *Tatler*, *Rambler*, *Spectator* and *Idler*, at least one, if not more, were found in most large libraries.⁵¹ The 4,000-volume library of William Byrd II is exemplary of a gentleman's library: Byrd owned numerous collected works of Chaucer, Ben Jonson, Pope, Milton, Swift, and Shakespeare. He read frequently in the *Tatler* as well. Despite the size of his library, he owned almost no novels. The books that most closely approximate novels were Delariviere Manley's *Court Intrigues, in a collection of original letters, from the island of the New Atalantis* (1711), which features examples of the sexual indiscretions of the aristocracy, and Alain Rene LeSage's *Gil Blas*.⁵²

Robert Carter of Nomini Hall is likewise typical of this profile. His novels included Fenelon's *Telemachus* (1701), *Tom Jones*, and *Tristram Shandy* (two sets). He owned Addison's, Pope's, and Swift's works and *The Spectator*, *Tatler*, and *Guardian*. He was somewhat unusual in also owning *Eulia a Novel*, and *Margaretta, a Sentimental Novel*; he may have ordered them for his well-read wife or for his young daughters.⁵³

⁵⁰ Diary of Catherine Fullerton, 1798, p. 9. DeRosset Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

⁵¹ Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*, 543-561.

⁵² Kevin J. Hayes, *The Library of William Byrd of Westover* (Madison: Madison House, 1997), 307, 302, 311.

⁵³ 'Catalogue of Library of Robert Carter compiled by Philip Fithian,' in Hunter Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, 1773-1774* (1943; reprint, Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1993), 221-229. Of course, the list Fithian produced records only the books at the Nomini Hall plantation on the Northern Neck in 1774-75; it does not touch the more than four hundred books Carter kept at his town house in Williamsburg. Undoubtedly Carter continued to add to his library until his death in 1804.

Similarly, reading the 1736 inventory of Charles Pasture of Henrico County, one is startled to find “Behns Plays” at the end of a list comprised solely of classical, divinity, and historical works.⁵⁴

In North Carolina, James Milner’s inventory reflects the same pattern as those of Virginia gentlemen. *Don Quixote* (London, 1712), *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), *Tristram Shandy*, *Pamela*, *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-54) and *Telemachus* all appear in his enormous inventory of several properties. He also read Pope, Swift, Smollett’s *History of England*, and Rosseau’s *Eloisa*. John Luttrell’s collection of books, as they appear in the inventory compiled by his wife after his death in 1782, is considerably smaller, but reflects the same profile of the English gentleman: law books, dictionaries, Smollett’s *History*, Pope’s and Addison’s *Works*, *The Spectator*, *Rambler*, and *Tatler*, and one novel: *Tristram Shandy*.⁵⁵ Englishmen in Virginia or North Carolina could be as worldly, cosmopolitan, and well-read as any gentlemen in England. Riding the success of their book sales in Orange County, North Carolina, partners William Johnston and Richard Bennehan ordered the most popular English novels, in an attempt to bring their clientele into the trans-Atlantic intellectual orbit. Importing only those tried and true elsewhere, they had assembled an inventory by March 1774 that included *Tristram Shandy*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Roderick Random* (1748), *Gil Blas* (1749), *Vicar of Wakefield*,

⁵⁴ “Books in Colonial Virginia,” *Virginia Historical Magazine*, 10 (1903), 404-05.

⁵⁵ Inventory, John Luttrell, 1782. Orange County Inventories Sales and Accounts of Estates, 1758-1809, p. 368-69. Inventory, James Milner, 17 December 1773. *North Carolina Wills and Inventories, Copied from the Original and recorded Wills and Inventories in the Office of the Secretary of State* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing co., 1912), 514-22.

Tom Jones, *Gay's Fables*, and Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768). The backcountry folk, clinging doggedly to their psalters and copies of *Whole Duty of Man* and *Pilgrim's Progress*, did not buy a single novel. Nor were they tempted by such belletristic works as *Bells Letters*, *Spectator*, *Universal Gazeteer*, or Pope's *Works*.⁵⁶

Cosmopolitan Charles Town, South Carolina was more receptive to novels than the North Carolina backcountry. The fourth largest city in the colonies, it had a thriving port; an elite who constructed a glittering life of balls, plays, concerts, horse races, and other amusements rivaling anything found in Europe; and a slave system that supported it all.⁵⁷ Further, the *South Carolina Gazette* was twice run by women printers, Elizabeth Timothy and Ann Timothy.⁵⁸ The former advertised *Pamela* for sale in her print shop in the 1740s.⁵⁹ She also printed dueling poems on gender issues, including in 1743 *The Lady's Complaint* that had appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* in 1737.⁶⁰ South Carolinian

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Cometti, "Some Early Best Sellers in Piedmont North Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* 17 (1950), 324-37.

⁵⁷ Jack Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 147; George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (1969; reprint, Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1980), 3.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Timothy took over the reins of the *South Carolina Gazette* in December 1738 after her husband's death. She ran the paper so successfully in spite of numerous personal tragedies (she buried four children) that Benjamin Franklin included a tribute to her in his autobiography. She apparently left South Carolina in 1749, after gradually phasing her son, Peter, into the trade. Ann Timothy married Peter Timothy in 1745 and published the *South Carolina Gazette* after her husband's death from 1783 until her death in 1792. Martha J. King, "Making an Impression: Women Printers in the Southern Colonies in the Revolutionary Era," (Ph.D. dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1992), 176-95, 258-59.

⁵⁹ Henning Cohen, *The South Carolina Gazette 1732-1775* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1953), 133.

⁶⁰ King, "Making an Impression," 182-85.

Eliza Lucas (later Pinckney) read and commented perceptively both on Richardson's construction of the novel and on the character of Pamela, herself.⁶¹ Wider circulation of novels was assisted by the formation of a society that published in 1750 "Rules of the Society for erecting a Library" in Charles Town.⁶² By late century, the Charleston presses were publishing English novels for distribution in America, including Hannah More's *The Inflexible Captive: A Tragedy* in 1774. In 1800 *The City Gazette* solicited subscriptions for the "celebrated novel" Agnes Maria Bennett's *The Beggergirl* [sic] and her *Benefactors* in 1800.⁶³

Indeed, colonial newspapers are an important index not only to the availability of novels but to the response to them as well. In 1752, a contributor to the *Virginia Gazette* decried the "wickedness of a prophane or libidinous Writer" as "much more atrocious and detestable than that of the hot Libertine or drunken Ravisher" since the writer committed his crime "with a cool deliberation."⁶⁴ It was no coincidence that novelists were compared to those who, inflamed by passions or alcohol, loosed their wickedness upon a society in which moderation of such passions was the very definition of virtue.

⁶¹ Lucas's comments are treated in Chapter 5. Lucas commented upon *Pamela* after she had finished reading it. For a different perspective, see Carol F. Karlsen and Laurie Crumpacker, eds., *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr 1754-1757* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) in which Burr comments on the book to her friend, Sarah Prince, as she is reading it.

⁶² Christopher Gould and Richard Parker Morgan, compilers, *South Carolina Imprints 1731-1800: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-Clio Information Services, 1985), 37. The "Rules" were published by Peter Timothy.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 96. Since there were no further announcements about *The Begger Girl* it is uncertain if it actually was published. *Ibid.*, 295.

⁶⁴ *Virginia Gazette*, (Williamsburg: Purdie and Dixon) 22 December 1752, 1.

A generation later, another essayist wrote that novels “falsify the understanding because never being founded upon truth, and only on Illusions, they warm the Imagination, weaken the Modesty, disorder the heart, and, if the young readers are of delicate feelings, hasten their disposition and precipitate them headlong into Errors.”⁶⁵ The novel was a “literary opium” in another writer’s opinion and had “contributed, more than any other cause, to debauch the morals of the Young of the Fair Sex.”⁶⁶

Particularly when one recalls the capitulation of the sentimental novel to a gendered order in which men are rational and women feeling creatures, such vociferous critiques are puzzling in *their* extremity of passion. Perhaps one source of concern was how readily available these books seemed to be. Julia Cherry Spruill observed that “large numbers of [romances] poured into the colonies during the last half of the century.”⁶⁷ To George Smart it was “apparent [the novel] was well represented” in southern libraries.⁶⁸ Eighteenth-century commentators certainly felt the force of the flood of novels. “This contagion,” wrote one in the *Virginia Gazette*, “is the more to be dreaded, as it daily spread through all ranks of people; and Miss, the Tailor’s daughter, talks now as familiarly to her confidante, Miss Polly Staytope, of Swains & sentiments as the

⁶⁵ “For the Perusal of our Female Readers,” *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg: Purdie and Dixon) 28 March 1773, 2. It is not known whether these critiques were written by English or American writers. Regardless of their origins, however, it is significant that they were printed by a Virginia press for consumption in that colony.

⁶⁶ “Essay on the Modern Novel,” *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg: Purdie and Dixon) 11 June 1772.

⁶⁷ Spruill, “Southern Lady’s Library,” 40.

⁶⁸ Smart, “Private Libraries,” 35. His chart on page 33 shows at a glance a rough subject distribution of books in colonial libraries.

accomplished dames of genteel life.”⁶⁹ One of the pernicious effects of reading novels was the drowning of distinctions of class in a sea of sentiment, a prospect that appears to have been regarded with horror even in the years immediately preceding the Revolution. Novels made common cause among all women, regardless of class, the writer recognized, in their interest in “Swains and sentiments.”

Indeed, since some novels could be had cheaply, they were no longer the preserve of the elite. The 1760 inventory of Mailana Drayton of Middlesex County, Virginia illustrates the point: eight (unspecified) volumes were valued at L3.7.4 and eleven volumes of French books at L3.2.4; her “parcel of novels,” (unfortunately, also unspecified) were worth only two shillings. David Rawson has discovered that books were printed in abridged forms and sold more cheaply than the full-length volumes printed and bound in London.⁷⁰ Jean Skipwith’s copy of *Manners: A Novel*, printed in New York in 1818, does not make nearly as impressive a presentation with its rough-edged, irregularly sized paper, as her elegantly bound and gilt five-volume set of *The Anchoret* (1773), with its London imprint.⁷¹ Inexpensive as cheap or abridged copies may have been, poorer readers could have avoided the expense altogether by borrowing books from wealthier neighbors. Evidence in the *Virginia Gazette* in the form of advertisements requesting that borrowed books be returned, suggests that planters’ libraries may well have served the same function as the social libraries of the northern

⁶⁹ *Virginia Gazette*, “Essay on the Modern Novel,” 11 June 1772.

⁷⁰ David A. Rawson, “ ‘Guardians of their own Liberty’: A Contextual History of Print Culture in Virginia Society, 1750-1820,” (Ph.D. dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1998), 433.

⁷¹ These books are housed in Special Collections, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

colonies.⁷² Women lent books to one another as well. In 1778 Anne Blair used “the occasion I have to remind my Dear Mrs. Randolph of the Poetry I lent her” to introduce to her an acquaintance.⁷³

The leveling effect of the novel, in its increasing availability by the end of the century, was apparent to fearful critics. Cathy Davidson noted that nineteenth-century printers Lane and Carey “understood as keenly as their detractors did that once the publishing industry shifts its primary attention and economy from a limited supply of non-fiction books intended for a specialized (and often elite) audience to a plethora of novels about and for middle- and working-class readers, we have a major shift in the social and political functions of culture.”⁷⁴ Of course, this development was years in the offing, but it is clear that critics of the novel foresaw its tremendous potential to invert the social as well as the gender order.

Probably the greatest reason for the tremendous anxiety about novels was their supposed insidious influence on the young women who read them. By the latter half of the century, most novelists were women. This is a significant development considering the reticence required of a respectable woman, not to mention the limitations on women’s education. Dale Spender’s explanation of the significance of the act of writing is worth quoting at length:

⁷² Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 624.

⁷³ Anne Blair to Frances Randolph (later Tucker) 17 April 1778. Coleman-Tucker Papers, College of William and Mary.

⁷⁴ Cathy Davidson, “The Life and Times of Charlotte Temple,” in Davidson, ed., *Reading in America*, 162.

The very act of writing – particularly for a public audience – was in essence an assertion of individuality and autonomy, and often an act of defiance. To write was to be; it was to create and to exist. It was to construct and control a world view without interference from the ‘masters’. No woman writer was oblivious to this; all of them had qualms about the propriety of being a woman and a writer, and almost all felt obliged to defend themselves against attack.⁷⁵

One is obliged to resist double temptations here, the first, to label women who *do* write as unrepresentative of their sex; there were far too many women, from all economic and social levels, writing in the eighteenth century to characterize them as exceptional.⁷⁶ The second temptation is to cast all women’s writing as feminist by virtue of the independent act of writing, but from the foregoing, it is clear that women wrote to uphold the gender order as well as to undermine it. But there is no question that by the end of the century the genre was most certainly gendered for in the novel, as Juliet Mitchell said, “women create themselves as a category: women.”⁷⁷ Regardless of their place on a

⁷⁵ Spender, *Mothers of the Novel*, 3. On the gendering of writing as masculine, see William J. Scheick, *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 14-16. Scheick’s study is exclusively about the northern colonies, “since southern women had far fewer opportunities than their northern sisters for their writings to be published,” (19).

⁷⁶ Cheryl Turner notes that “two key features” of professional women writers’ authorship in the eighteenth century: “its function as a source of income for the impecunious, literate woman...and the ascendancy of the middle class amongst literary women.” Turner, *Living by the Pen*, 67. Turner appends “A Catalogue of women’s fiction published in book form 1696-1796” to her book. It is an invaluable list of 446 works of prose fiction, 154-211.

⁷⁷ Juliet Mitchell, “Femininity, Narrative, and Psychoanalysis,” in Mary Eagleton, ed., *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 100. See also Ellen Moers, “Literary Women,” in *ibid.*, 96-98, linking the rise of the novel with “the rise of women to professional literary status.” Ros Ballaster’s “Romancing the Novel” argues that women’s writings were labeled (derisively) romances, because of their flight of fancy plots and characters; men’s writings were called novels because of the male monopoly on reason and realism, (188-200).

continuum of radical to conservative, by setting forth their thoughts in this most public forum, women writers provided dubious models for the daughters of anxious fathers.⁷⁸

Indeed, denied access to formal education, women readers welcomed novels as educational material.⁷⁹ The genre held increasing authority for young women since it more closely paralleled their thoughts, feelings, and sympathies than did traditional didactic literature. These stories rang true for them. The reflections of two young Virginians, Betsey Ambler and Mildred Smith, upon the seduction of their acquaintance Rachel Warrington were dominated by ideas about education. A right education, they believed, such as Betsey received from her father, may well have saved Rachel from the disastrous consequences of her naivete.⁸⁰ As Cathy Davidson has pointed out, "Virtually

⁷⁸ Feminist literary theory has questioned whether there is a 'female imagination,' that is a tradition of female experience that is expressed in a distinctively female literature. In the 1970s, Patricia Spacks *The Female Imagination* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975) posed this question without really answering it. While Elaine Showalter discovered a female subculture of women fiction writers in the nineteenth century in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973) asserted that women had to recover the language men stole from them in the book of Genesis. Janet Todd describes these early efforts at feminist literary criticism in America in *Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc., 1988), 17-33, and the French critiques of what they saw as American materialism. "Although I do not believe there is a female identity that can somehow be known outside the patriarchy in which we and women of the past have all lived," Todd concluded, I can accept a difference in male and female experience and I do not regard it as essentialist in any pejorative way to stress it." *Feminist Literary Theory*, 138. For many viewpoints conveniently located in one volume, see Eagleton, ed., *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

⁷⁹ Spender, ed., *Living By the Pen*, 32.

⁸⁰ This story is recounted in detail in Chapter 5. Ambler's father had followed a "plan of education" that suggests a considered purposefulness that did not normally characterize girls' education in Virginia. He composed various handwriting, composition, and arithmetic lessons for his daughters (Betsey Ambler's sister, Mary, became the wife of the future chief justice of the Supreme Court, John Marshall). He also had them read the two-volume *Preceptor* (a work directed to boys) containing sections on geography,

every American novel written before 1820 . . . includes either a discourse on the necessity of improved education (often with special attention to the need for better female education) . . . or, at the very least, a comment on the educational levels and reading habits of the hero and even more so the heroine.”⁸¹ Young women readers used this literature as examples of good writing; it provided necessary education *outside* the classroom. For as one of Eliza Haywood’s “correspondents” to the *Female Spectator* argued, men need “to be more careful of the education of those females to whom they are parents or guardians! Would they convince them in their infancy that dress and show are not the essentials of a fine lady, and that true beauty is seated in the mind.”⁸² But what is a girl to do if her father fails in this duty?

One answer, of course, is to consult a book; but which book? Novels, more than the patriarchal writings of Allestree or Halifax, enabled a community of writing and reading women to share information and ideas. Women’s novels may have been trivialized as romances, because the inversion of gender relations they presented were so fantastical in a patriarchal culture (and therefore *unrealistic*), but they gave women opportunities to imagine a world different from the one they knew.⁸³ “If a woman

natural history, logic, and moral philosophy. R[obert] and J. Dodslely, *The Preceptor: Containing a General Course of Education. Wherein the First Principles of Polite Learning are Laid Down in a Way most suitable for trying the GENIUS and advancing the Instruction of YOUTH* (Printed at Tully’s Head in Pall-mall, London, 1763).

⁸¹ Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, 66.

⁸² Priestly, ed., *The Female Spectator*, 56. One of Haywood’s devices in her *Female Spectator* was to write letters from fictitious readers, allowing her to raise whatever issues she wished in her publication and dispensing with the necessity of a staff.

⁸³ Ballaster, “Gender and Genre in Early Theories of Narrative,” 195. In this way, Ballaster points out, women’s writings do not conform to Ian Watt’s (or eighteenth-century male writers’) idea of ‘realism’ in male-authored novels.

sought to learn how other woman coped with reality,” Linda Kerber observed, “she had few printed resources other than fiction to which she might turn.” Histories, even Catherine Macaulay’s *History of England*, featured men at the center of all events worth recording; women made only the rarest of appearances. “To deny women access to novels,” Kerber continued, “was to deny them access to a rich imagery of what women were and what they might hope to become.”⁸⁴

Of course, this deeply personal way of reading was precisely what some male writers feared. What would happen to the social order or, more to the point, the order in their homes, if women spent their time in idle reading to the neglect of their housework? Women, too, were self-conscious about the time they spent with their books. Frances Baylor Hill carefully noted the chores she had completed daily, in addition to her novel reading. Similarly, Philadelphian Elizabeth Drinker felt guilty about her reading. “’Tis seldom I listen to a romance, nor would I encourage my Children doing much of that business,” she wrote in her diary in 1795, even though she was doing her needlework while her daughter read aloud.⁸⁵ But as Kerber cogently observed, “leisure does not happen, it is made,” and even as women sought to justify the time they spent reading, the important point is that they made time for it.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1980), 263-64.

⁸⁵ Diary of Elizabeth Drinker, 20 June 1795. Quoted in Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 238. Kerber’s analysis of women’s reading in the early national period relies heavily on this wonderful source. American women’s commentaries on their reading are precious few before the rise of women’s academies in the nineteenth century, even in the North.

⁸⁶ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 249.

Clearly, then, novels were much more than diversionary reading; instead, as Cathy Davidson observed, novels spoke “directly to the fears and expectations” of female readers, as heroines struggled to preserve both their virtue and the prospect for happiness in marriage.⁸⁷ Female readers “read themselves into their fictions and their fictions into their lives”; they personally appropriated the stories for their own and applied them to their own existence. Novels allowed the reader to see her life as “largely the consequence of her own choices and not merely as the product of the power of others [men] in her life,” even though most of these novels portrayed the powerlessness of women in seduction scenarios.⁸⁸ It was heady wine. The message of these seduction tales was plain: women must not relinquish control of their lives to men, but educate themselves instead to avoid the lures of passion and to judge men shrewdly for themselves. By the end of the eighteenth century, American novels depicted the complexity that encompassed both “personal capability and public powerlessness” in women’s lives as heroines were forced to choose between equally unsatisfactory alternatives in plots that were, not so subtly, critiques of patriarchy.⁸⁹

Assessing eighteenth-century readers from a distance of two hundred years raises obvious difficulties, but a twentieth-century study of romance novel readers, who could be interviewed, offered uncanny parallels between the two groups of women readers. Accepting the basic tenet of reader-response theory that “literary meaning is not

⁸⁷ Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, 122. Davidson made these points about the empowering appeal of novels to women, referring to the development of the American novel between 1789 and 1820. Her insights, however, are equally applicable to earlier reading of imported English novels in the colonial South.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 73, 123.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

something to be found IN a text [but] is rather an entity produced by a reader in conjunction with the text's verbal structure," Janice Radway conducted interviews with women whose sole connection was the bookseller from whom they bought their romances. The connection between these two groups of women readers across the centuries was the basic shared belief held by both in the "inevitability and reality of male power and the force of social convention to circumscribe a woman's ability to act in her own interests." This view colors how readers view the characters and their behavior. As Radway illustrated the point: a feminist reader would perceive heroines as "foolish, dependent, or even pathetic," while a reader unsure of the equality of men and women would view romantic heroines as courageous.⁹⁰ This perspective yields others held in common. A happy ending, for example, is when the heroine wins the love of the male hero, "secur[ing] the attention and recognition of her culture's most powerful and essential representative, a man." In this way, the heroine is legitimated as lover, wife, and (eventually, it is understood) mother, the roles her culture has marked out for her. Just as eighteenth-century sentimental novelists feminized their heroes for their readers, so do twentieth-century romances. The ideal man understands and holds the heroine, looking deeply into her eyes, nurturing her in ways that a mother does with her child, giving the reader vicariously what she lacks in her real life.⁹¹

Both sets of readers needed to legitimate their reading. Radway's readers insisted, to her and to their husbands, on the romances' educational benefits: history and

⁹⁰ Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 78.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 84, 212.

geography were useful by-products of their reading.⁹² Their reading also served as an escape, enabling them to return to the emotionally demanding jobs of nurturing their families refreshed and better able to serve. Indeed, Radway's readers echoed eighteenth-century views of females as naturally nurturant, generous, and self-abnegating; "in serving them [her husband and children]," Radway observed of her typical reader, "she also serves herself."⁹³ Sometimes the justifications failed to convince and Radway's readers were reduced to hiding the books, the tell-tale bookstore bags (they were bright blue), and the expense. They frequently had to hide their act of reading as well when husbands, realizing the mental flight their wives took while reading even as they sat in the same room, refused to tolerate their wives' reading.⁹⁴

Radway's description of romance writing and reading is equally applicable for both centuries: "a collectively elaborated female ritual through which women explore the consequences of their common social condition as the appendages of men and attempt to imagine a more perfect state where all the needs they so intensely feel and accept as given would be adequately addressed." Like the sentimental novels of two hundred years ago, today's romances (and their readers) leave essentially untouched their roles in a patriarchal culture. Similarly, the literature and the readers of both centuries placed the burden on the woman to resist men's advances, to bring her man to perfection by bringing out the tender part of his character; and ultimately to provide her own nurturance by being the instrument of his reform. For women of both centuries, novels and

⁹² Ibid., 106, 186.

⁹³ Ibid., 94.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 87, 103.

romances can be seen as a way to counter despair, in Radway's words, a "minimal but nonetheless legitimate form of protest."⁹⁵

Given our distance from our historical subjects, it is more difficult to determine how novels functioned in the eighteenth-century South. The writings of English Restoration women are but a negligible presence in the South during the early years of the century. There are several possible reasons this was so, not the least of which were the very practical considerations of low literacy rates and a developing society struggling to survive. More importantly, one suspects that the overt role-reversals in many of these early works must have been patently intolerable for gentry planters determined to establish their hegemony over poorer whites, women, and blacks. The ancient English festival of the 'Lord of Misrule' simply could not be observed in the slave South. Nor could Alexander Pope's quip that "every woman is a female rake" be proven in the South. Kathleen Brown discovered that the term 'wench,' usually referring to poor, working women in England, was applied almost exclusively to black women by the end of the eighteenth century in Virginia.⁹⁶ A white woman had too much to lose to risk the label 'wench' by rakish behavior, so inextricably bound were virtue, gender, and race.

As Hannah Lee Corbin's 1782 inventory suggests, the sentimental novel (Janet Todd's second stage) had found an audience among elite women. Corbin's inventory, though brief, presents an interesting counterpoint to the books available in 1775 at the Williamsburg print shop. Women's reading culture tended to favor female authors rather

⁹⁵ Ibid., 212-216, 22.

⁹⁶ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 101-104, 370.

than the male authors found in the print shop (although Richardson's *Pamela* was popular). Bookselling was a precarious business; the *Virginia Gazette* printers made the bulk of their money in government commissions and newspaper sales. Catering to a reading public would seem to make good business sense, but with the exception of the overtly religious Elizabeth Singer Rowe or Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator* (a work more in line with sentimental novels than her earlier works had been), the shop stocked few women's works. Corbin skipped the Virginia middleman altogether, ordering her novels directly from England.

For some readers, however, even male-authored novels constituted a threat to a virtuous life. In 1844, Nancy Johns Turner (1792-1850) wrote "The Imaginationist," in which she described her girlhood introduction to novels, her fall in an imprudent marriage and divorce at age sixteen, and her subsequent redemption in her education and teaching and second marriage to a minister. The daughter of a Presbyterian preacher, she had been cruelly disappointed in her hopes for a fine boarding school education (she was the fifth child of ten). Left to her own devices at home, she perused her father's library. "Unfortunately for me I now spied in a corner, where they seemed to have been placed merely to fill up a vacancy; about half a doz. Novels, such as *Peregrine Pickle*, *Roderick Random*, *Gil Blas*, and others," Turner wrote. She had seen them there before, but not until that "fatal morning" had she ever been so drawn to them. "While conscious of the sin," she confessed, "I opened & read them, one after another until all were perused. . . . when I had read the last, I almost wept that there were no more to read."⁹⁷ "Why my

⁹⁷ Nancy Johns Turner, "The Imaginationist or Recollections of an old lady, a native of one of the southern States, now a resident of the State of Ohio in the Year 1844," 18. 4 volumes. Virginia Historical Society. The Virginia Historical Society also holds a 190-page typescript transcription. Page numbers refer to the typescript. Turner would have

good and pious father suffered such vile books as these surely were to encumber his shelves, I never could imagine,” Turner wrote, nor could she summon the courage to ask him, even years after her “reformation.”⁹⁸

The novels were responsible for the romantic dreams Turner expected to be fulfilled in her rash first marriage. Just as many novels that warned their readers against reading novels, Turner advised her readers “in your proper sphere, [to] try to render [this world] less miserable by acts of usefulness but never sit down supinely & fold your hands and dream yourself away into the regions of fancy until a new and fairy world arises under your creative hand. If you do; depend upon it you will reap the bitter reward . . . if your life be spared.”⁹⁹ When a friend applied to her for advice about a love affair, she cautioned, “if either of you should turn out to be in love with a creature of your own imagination – a perfect being. . . you will surely reap your reward in disappointed hopes, & consequent misery.” She cast back to her own experience when she admitted, “my notions of love have been quite visionary I suppose; & old folks say I have not got hold of the right thing yet.”¹⁰⁰

Turner took to heart the fatal consequences potentially attendant upon the romantic notions novels inspired, “if your life be spared,” she had warned. In the meantime, novels could cause immediate detrimental effects: “Many a little Miss just entering her ’teens have I seen stealing to her solitary room. . . I have seen these

read these novels sometime before 1808, the date of her first marriage. She titled chapter 5, “My first peep into novels, and its consequences. Heartrending disappointment.”

⁹⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 31-32.

wandering about the house, with a broad grin and vacant look of the idiot," utterly forgetful of their domestic duties.¹⁰¹

Just as readers received conflicting messages from novels that either upheld or undermined their view of virtue, so, too, by the end of the century did print culture in the South convey double messages. The *Virginia Gazette* continued to print traditional essays such as the "Good Wife," and strident warnings against novels even as it sold novels from its print shop. But in a society in which men read their way to models of English gentility (William Byrd II, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson come readily to mind), it is not surprising that women whose literacy rates were gradually rising, should pursue the same course in reading. Writing would be a different issue altogether.

Just as English women began writing novels out of their tradition of letter writing, there are the faintest suggestions that Virginia women tried their hand in their letters at the richly detailed descriptions that were the mark of novels' "realism." Shortly after the Revolution ended, Jane Hunter Charlton of Williamsburg received an eager request from an English correspondent. "O how I long to have an account from your descriptive Pen of all the events that you have experience'd both of Publick and private nature," she added, dissatisfied with the accounts she had read in the English press. Nor would she confine Charlton's pen to domestic events, demanding to know her view of public ones as well. She was confident that Charlton's reply would satisfy[wd] her: "You have the power of making the merest trifles interesting and then when you have such ample matter do not fail soon to gratefy me with a relation of all you have undergon in the season of

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 25.

dreadful War.”¹⁰² Charlton had a story to tell, the talent with which to tell it, and the perspective (female) from which her English friend wanted to hear it.

Similarly, young Mildred Smith was eager to have her friend Betsey Ambler write up her tale of flight from the invading British army from the environs of Yorktown, through the hills of northwestern Virginia to Winchester, and then south to Richmond in 1780. Their flight included several anxious episodes of alarms of approaching soldiers and sleepless nights. “As soon as the bustle & fatigue [of] moving is over,” however, Mildred Smith wanted a “long letter.”¹⁰³ Ambler obliged, sending Smith a “specimen of my powers at the descriptive” that began with a romantically stylized introduction: “On a fine summer morning early in June, e’er the rose tints of m[orn] were lessened by the sunbeams of summer”¹⁰⁴ -- and so on.

It is significant that no novels would come from southern women in the eighteenth century. This may be because of the role the novel played in the South. It has been noted that southern men owned male-authored novels from a canon of literature that enabled their participation in a culture of English belle lettres (although Richardson’s *Pamela* did not enjoy the same popularity in the South as it did in the northern colonies).¹⁰⁵ The novels that enjoyed the greatest popularity with southern women were

¹⁰² M. Klotz to Jane Charlton, 18 August 1783. Robinson Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁰³ Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1780, Letter No. 1. Ambler Family Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

¹⁰⁴ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 1780, Letter No. 2. Ambler Family Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), 119-1120.

those that had accommodated to conventional understandings of gender, that celebrated the tender, pious, and nurturant nature of women. Hannah Lee Corbin's *History of a Lady of Distinction*, for example, was a tale of a young woman's struggle to keep to the moral high road in an arranged marriage to a womanizing aristocrat; she dutifully strove to conform to the eighteenth-century image of a good wife. One of Lady Jean Skipwith's favorite authors was Maria Edgeworth, who published late in the century and into the nineteenth. The heroines of Edgeworth's novels who encounter happy endings were those women who understood most perfectly a woman's domestic role.¹⁰⁶

Felicity Nussbaum's comment that the novels' suffering young women sentimentalized women's inferiority is crucial to understanding how southern women may have read these novels. We have seen how novels could both subvert and uphold the gender order; it is entirely possible that the sentimentalization of women's inferiority was the main theme women in the South drew from their reading. Accepting their inferiority, women turned to their men for approval, in much the same way as Radway's romance heroine looked for validation in her hero's love. The approval that daughters sought from father, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace has pointed out, was a different kind of tyranny. "Paradoxically, the most powerful kind of patriarchal control is one that is least coercive, one that, in making the daughter so dependent on her father's love and esteem, makes her least likely to view him critically," she explained, "the most powerful kind of patriarchal control is precisely a *seduction*."¹⁰⁷ This is the kind of patriarchal control

¹⁰⁶ Craft-Fairchild, *Masquerade and Gender*, 166.

¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Fathers' Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 95.

Landon Carter could only dream of; none of his children satisfied his ceaseless efforts to be appreciated and obeyed out of love for him. When his daughter Judith married against his wishes, he was sure it was because of the pernicious influence of romances.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, Thomas Jefferson's famous letter to his daughter Martha, in which he told her that "No body in this world can make me so happy, or so miserable as you," played upon her very deep emotional dependence on him that he had fostered in her.¹⁰⁹

In the rigidly hierarchical society of the South, the sentimentalization of women's inferiority both demanded male protection and matched male notions of honor. This reading, of course, suggests women's complicity in a construction of gender that used male honor to their advantage, to safeguard their reputations, and to maintain the strict divide between themselves and those termed 'wench.' But at what price this accommodation? Again, women's novels of choice may yield a clue. Just two years before her death, novelist Susanna Rowson wrote proudly that "among the productions of my pen I have never promulgated a sentence that could militate against the best interests of religion, virtue, and morality."¹¹⁰ John Richetti's reading of early English fiction revealed a "structure [that] tends to take the form of a dramatic confrontation between

¹⁰⁸ Jack Greene, ed., *Diary of Landon Carter of Sabine Hall 1752-1778* (1965; reprint, Richmond: The Virginia Historical Society, 1987), 868, 7 October 1774.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson, 28 March 1787. Edwin Morris Betts and James Adam Bear, Jr., eds., *The Family Letters of Thomas Jefferson* (1966; reprint: Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986), 35. This letter is one of many conduct of life advice letters he wrote to his daughters.

¹¹⁰ 12 October 1822, Preface to *Exercises in History, Chronology, and Biography*. Quoted in Cathy Davidson, ed., *Charlotte Temple by Susanna Rowson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xxvii.

two opposing attitudes to experience” that he loosely termed “secular” and “religious.”¹¹¹ In the shift to novels for advice by the early nineteenth century, it is possible to see not a decline in interest in religion, but a renewed interest in a subject that had acquired new -- and much more engaging-- packaging. Women may have helped build their white pedestals, but they also may have learned from novels how to appropriate a religious and moral authority that did not leave them powerless.

To conclude that Jean Skipwith’s library indicates a growing disregard for religion then, may be mistaken. The novels that by the nineteenth century supplanted traditional advice in Jean Skipwith’s library are heavily infused with religious themes, and although her papers are distressingly few, two items remain which suggest the importance to her of both religion and her novels. As Jean Miller, the future Lady Skipwith had been living in Scotland for over twenty-five years when her sister’s widower, Sir Peyton Skipwith, persuaded her to return to Virginia. When he urged her to marry him, he called upon the authority of the church to resolve whatever doubts she had about the legality of their marriage. He enclosed a copy of a letter written by the Reverend John Cameron, a well-respected Anglican clergyman, and (probably not coincidentally) a Scot.¹¹² The enclosure, Skipwith hoped, would “determine you immediately to compleat a Union on which my future happiness so much & so immediately depends.” He also had letters, he told her, from “the most eminent Characters in the Law equally favorable to our purpose,” presumably to serve as a back-up argument, but he

¹¹¹ Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson*, 13.

¹¹² Landon C. Bell, *Cumberland Parish, Lunenburg County, Virginia 1746-1818; Vestry Book 1746-1818* (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1930), 132-143. Cameron, born and ordained in Scotland, served in Bristol Parish 1784-1793.

sent the one he knew would carry the most weight.¹¹³ The law might allow their marriage, but Jean Miller wanted the church's sanction more.

Sir Peyton Skipwith died in 1805. How much comfort in her mourning Jean Skipwith derived from her devotional texts, we do not know. But on the back of a receipt, dated 1807, are the words of the fictional Agnes De-Courci:

-- They pursued the same studies, "and like two artificial gods, creating with their needles, both one flower, both on one sampler, sitting, on our Cushion, both warbling of our Song, both in our key; as if their hands, their sides, voices, and minds, had been incorporate: so they grew together like to a double cherry, seeming parted, but with an union in partitions."—When she recollected "all the counsel that they two had shared, this sister Vows, the hours that they had spent, when they chid the hasty-footed time that was to part them.--"¹¹⁴

Jean Skipwith's search for the words to describe her marriage to Sir Peyton ended in a novel. It is interesting that she chose a depiction of love between two women. United in mind, work, and soul, the couple had transcended the barriers that gender conventions had erected. It was a remarkable tribute in an age that assigned so meticulously by sex intellectual capacity, religious duty, and most certainly, labor.

The introduction of the novel to the colonial South meant different things to men and women. A mark of genteel participation in the culture of English belle-lettres, the novel served the same function for men as did their works in the classics, philosophy, or poetry. For women, the novel meant something else. Regardless of the moral light in which they viewed novels, women read them absorbedly (sometimes in spite of

¹¹³ Peyton Skipwith to Jean Miller, 7 September 1788. Skipwith Family Papers, College of William and Mary.

¹¹⁴ Quoting Mrs. Agnes Maria Bennett, *Agnes De-Courci: A Domestic Tale*, vol. I, pp. 92, 100. Receipt from William Potts, 1807. Skipwith Family Papers. Jean Skipwith owned the second edition, printed in London in 1797. Special Collections at the College of William and Mary holds only volumes II and III; the citation and all punctuation is Jean Skipwith's.

themselves), read themselves into them, and read the novels into their lives. As patriarchy changed over this period to meet the challenges to the conventional order posed by urbanization in England and slavery in the colonial south, so too did advice literature, including the novel. Efforts first to resist the tide and then to find a way to flow with it (preferably while keeping one's female head above water) engaged the plot lines of women novelists for the entire century. To the extent that the meager evidence allows, it is plausible to conclude that the reading preferences of southern women followed these trends as well. They turned the sentimentalization of female inferiority to their ends, while they drew upon the authority they believed the union of virtue, sentiment, and religion gave them. Jan Lewis noted of early nineteenth-century Virginians that their writings "convey little sense of religious community; they more often discussed their personal trials than church or shared religious life."¹¹⁵ The individual rather than communal emphasis is evident in eighteenth-century letters as well, as women conveyed a lively sense of interaction with God's will. But even in the solitary act of reading, within the physical isolation of plantation life and the emotional isolation of a patriarchal hierarchy, women drew upon the shared experiences of other writing and reading women.¹¹⁶ Reading their novels as secular catechisms, they learned truths

¹¹⁵ Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (1983; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 243, n. 42.

¹¹⁶ Women's worlds did not extend very far beyond their own plantations. Darrett and Anita Rutman found that at the turn of the eighteenth century in Middlesex County, 36% of marrying couples married someone who lived within a one-half mile of their homes. Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia 1650-1750* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984), 121. By mid to late century, gentry patterns of visiting, especially for women, widened geographically, but because visits tended to be restricted to kin, women's circles of influence remained domestic. Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 194-230. Laurel Thatcher

about men and women, life and love, right and wrong. The following chapter will present in four case studies a closer look at ways in which southern women read their novels.

Ulrich has observed the differences in the cycles of the lives of men and women in agricultural communities, noting that while men's were bound by the agricultural seasons, women's were bound by "personal seasons of prgnancy and lactation." Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (1980; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 135.

CHAPTER V

READING NOVELS IN THE SOUTH

If one were to judge novels by the *Virginia Gazette*'s response to them, it was obvious that they were an exercise in futility. Crafted to appeal to the very audience propriety forbade, novels theoretically should have found no readership among the respectable, literate women who could afford them. Indeed, London writer Clara Reeve commented in 1785 that the circulating libraries which had sprung up to accommodate the demand for novels were "one source of the vices and follies of our present times."¹ Charlotte Palmer vainly hoped to avoid such censure when she called her book *It is and it is not, a Novel* at the end of the century.² But, as Terence Martin reminds us, storytellers (or novelists in this case) have always been the "traditional opponent of authoritarian rule,"³ which rule was being challenged on both sides of the Atlantic in the eighteenth century. The debate over women's proper place in society was complicated by the agitation of men who were in similar circumstances: unlanded, possessed of

¹ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance* (London, 1785); quoted in J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 1.

² Tompkins, *Popular Novel in England*, 16. "No, my dear," London critic, *The Critical*, admonished Palmer "it is *not* a novel; but be a good girl; do so no more; and we will say nothing about it this time." Ibid.

³ Terence Martin, *Parables of Possibility: The American Need for Beginnings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 103.

movable property, and formally excluded from the vote.⁴ Novels that pilloried aristocratic pretensions to merit or upset gender roles, therefore, drew vociferous criticism in England and in Virginia.

Yet it was equally clear that women in the South imported and read novels; that they shared them with friends; and that they were important. What is much more difficult to ascertain is how southern women read their novels. The records are scarce.⁵ One searches almost in vain for women in the written records left by their fathers, brothers, and husbands. Until the rise of ladies' seminaries and academies in the nineteenth century, there is little direct testimony from southern women about their reading.⁶ Instead, their responses to the new advice literature are found in a literary allusion; an imitation of style or substance; or thoughts on courtship, marriage, female roles, and responsibilities that differed from the traditional advice literature that emanated, privately and publicly, from male pens and presses late into the century. In the following series of short case studies, four elite women show a range of responses to novels throughout the century that had, at their center, a passionate regard for the books'

⁴ Linda Colley, "Womanpower," in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 237-81.

⁵ Robert Darnton bemoans this problem for eighteenth-century France in *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*. It is difficult to describe the literary culture of the *ancien regime*, he observes, when no answer has yet been found to the 'simpler' question: What did eighteenth-century Frenchmen read? Attempts at quantitative measures are helpful, but cannot "reduce the reader's internal experience to numbers, or measure quality quantitatively, or produce a numerical standard of literary influence." Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 173. The present study of Virginia faces precisely the same quandries.

⁶ See Mary Carroll Johansen, "'Female Instruction and Improvement': Education for Women in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, 1785-1835." Ph.D. dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1996.

heroines and their plights.

I: The Vicissitudes of Life in Revolutionary Virginia

The following case study, from Revolutionary Virginia, illustrates a way of discerning reader response in the absence of any specific mention of reading. Although the young correspondents never mention a novel by name, it is obvious that they had read sentimental literature and that its lessons had permeated their thinking. Rarely is the line between the traditional and new advice sharply drawn. Just as secular advice drew from overtly religious works, so too did novels and short stories build upon the foundation of ideas of gender promoted in the older advice of the likes of Richard Allestree and George Savile, Lord Halifax. The correspondence of young Betsey Ambler and her friend Mildred Smith show the influence of both strains of advice as they watched and reflected upon the doleful consequences of a friend's fall from virtue.

In her advancing age, Eliza Jaquelin Ambler Brent Carrington often found herself drawn to the little cabinet that held treasured old manuscripts and letters. Reading them “frequently beguiled a miserable day” and prompted memories of how the presence of elegant French officers had relieved the chill of a Yorktown winter, that of 1780-81, and rendered that little town so “gay and delightful.” Sparing no effort in their attentions to the people of York, they devised magnificent entertainments; “at least,” Carrington added with some asperity, “they appeared so to persons unused to *french style*.”⁷ Her disenchantment was warranted; one of her own friends, Rachel Warrington, had

⁷ Eliza Ambler Brent Carrington to Ann Ambler Fisher, 11 March 1823, Ambler Family Papers (typed transcripts), #53, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; Eliza Ambler Brent Carrington, “Variety or the vicissitudes of Long life,” n.d. (typed transcript), pp. 9, 10, *ibid*.

succumbed to the charms of those very appearances. This capitulation, from which ensued an unwanted pregnancy and an illegitimate son, cost Warrington her reputation and any chance of a favorable marriage.

Decades after the French officers' brief but passionate flirtation with Yorktown and its environs, Eliza Carrington began (although never completed) a novel to set down lessons learned from Warrington's experience. She drew on her correspondence with Mildred Smith, the dearest friend of her girlhood, to mull over the meaning of Warrington's seduction. Her fictionalized meditation encompassed larger questions about the very nature of "the Sex" and its strengths and weaknesses.

It is revealing that the adult Eliza attempted to frame her reflections on her adolescence as a novel. As a girl, the young Betsey (she does not appear as "Eliza" until her later letters) had witnessed a real-life drama that suggested the classic plot of the sentimental novel. The heroines of this newest genre of advice literature taught clearly discernible lessons to their readers about the need to rely on their own wits, rather than male protection, to preserve their virtue. The correspondence of Betsey Ambler and Mildred Smith, in addition to Ambler's unfinished novel, shows how two young Virginia women turned for counsel more to the newer literature that depicted life as they knew it than to the traditional advice.

Betsey and Mildred were daughters of prominent and wealthy Yorktown families. Betsey's father was Jaquelin Ambler, collector of the king's customs in Yorktown before the Revolution a member of Governor Thomas Jefferson's Council during the war, and then state treasurer until his death in 1802. Mildred's father, Lawrence Smith, Jr., served as paymaster for the Virginia troops during the Revolution and owned substantial

property in Yorktown.⁸ During the struggle for independence, both families witnessed momentous changes in their once secure world. Both the Amblers and the Smiths suffered appreciable financial losses resulting from the British invasion.⁹ Ambler's family had twice fled into the hinterlands to avoid capture by the enemy and it was during the course of these separations that the correspondence between Betsey and Mildred began.

Other, less martial perils awaited young women of the revolutionary era as well. Jay Fliegelman has argued that a "new cultural orthodoxy," dominated by the theme of parent-child relationships, emerged during these years.¹⁰ The discourse of the American colonists in their dialogue with their "parent," Great Britain, was mirrored in their relationships with their children. Inspired by John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, parents rejected the authoritarian model of child rearing in favor of one that prepared children to make their own informed moral choices. Increasingly, for example, daughters relied on their own judgment to choose their husbands; consequently, love and sexual attraction began to figure more prominently than parental preferences in the selection of a spouse.¹¹ The difficulty, of course, was how a young woman could

⁸ "Officers of the State Line during the Revolutionary Period," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 2 (1894-95), 362.

⁹ Jaquelin Ambler estimated that the losses of his house and smoke house, destroyed during the invasion, amounted to £418. The losses sustained by Lawrence Smith's estate totaled approximately twenty-one hundred pounds. See Martha Woodroof Hiden, ed., "Losses of York County Citizens in British Invasion, 1781," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2d ser., 7 (1927), 132.

¹⁰ Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchy, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 66.

¹¹ On these developments in eighteenth-century Virginia, see Rhys Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790* (1982; reprint New York: W. W. Norton, 1988);

preserve both her innocence and virtue and yet become worldly-wise enough to make an intelligent choice. Seventeenth-century instructions that counseled women how to live quietly (if not always contentedly) in their arranged marriages no longer seemed entirely applicable.

As young women who moved in the highest political and social circles of revolutionary Virginia, Betsey Ambler and Mildred Smith had access to the latest fashions in literature. Indeed, in their letters they imitated the very language of sentimental novels. Their attempts were clearly playful. "What is life without a friend?" Ambler mused in 1780 to her best friend. "At the sight of thee," she continued, "(or rather at thy well known hand) my gloomy soul cheers up and gladness [*illegible*] within me." She then broke off, however, and reverted to the practical fifteen-year-old she was: "So much for the romantic. . . [W]hat is the world coming to if we plain Y---k girls should become heroines[?]" Of Smith's attempt to romanticize their names, Ambler teased, "Who would have thought that my Millia or rather my charming Mildred who is just as sweet and lovely as any Heroine of times past, present, or to come should try her powers at the heroic[?]" Ambler doubted her more sober friend's ability to transform herself into a romantic heroine. "How your plain home spun cautious habits can ever be

and Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). For further developments in the nineteenth century, see Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (1984; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985); and Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980) and Linda Kerber's *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) examine these changes for American women in the colonial and early national periods.

converted into [those] of a heroine is the difficulty,” she remarked.¹² Yet it had been the dour Smith who had asked, “[N]ow what would I give if you had a name a little more romantic[?]”¹³

Not all their correspondence was playful, fanciful imitation. Echoing the warnings implicit in so much of the new advice literature about the snares of the world lying in wait to trap the innocent, Smith voiced concerns about Ambler’s naivete and the company she had kept in Yorktown. “May I tell you dearest [girl] without offense,” Smith began tactfully, “that the influence of Rachel [Warrington] over you had become so powerful th[at] I began to fear the effects of her example; not that I could for a moment suspect [a well] bred girl of practising indiscretions such as hers,” she hastened to add, “but to one of your artless u[nsuspi]cious temper, admiring her as you have always done, and flattered by her attentions, without ever once suspecting her of making an improper use of your credulity; I [do] not but believe [sic] that your removal [to Richmond] is fortunate.”¹⁴

For Smith, Rachel Warrington embodied all those faults and weaknesses of “the Sex.” “She has more bewitching talents for seducing a guileless heart than any human being I have ever known,” Smith warned; “. . . [A]pppearance and *effect*, is every thing.” Referring to the behavior of Rachel and her sister Camilla in Yorktown upon the arrival of the French, Smith added, “[T]heir late conduct has been So extraordinary that all eyes

¹² Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 1780, Letter No. 2, Ambler Family Papers.

¹³ Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1780, Letter No. 1, *ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

are fixed upon them.”¹⁵ Rachel Warrington flouted the conventions of modesty, meekness, and female virtue. Clearly, her behavior deeply offended Smith, who had accepted the strictures of female decorum depicted in advice literature and who was growing concerned lest her guileless friend be dazzled by the brilliance of Warrington’s “bewitching talents.”

Ambler acknowledged that her friend’s concern was not entirely groundless. She told Smith of an invitation to a ball given in her honor at the palace in Williamsburg. “You who know me well can readily judge how my heart fluttered at this mark of attention—I play[ed] off a thousand airs that would have provoked a le[cture] from you, an hour long.” With respect to Smith’s warnings about her friendship with Warrington, however, Ambler delivered a gentle rebuke: “Would you believe [*sic*] that I thought she could never do wrong[?]”¹⁶

Smith’s fears regarding Warrington were not unfounded. Ambler was able to resist the older girl’s worldly influence, but the young women watched as Warrington’s life played out the classic plot of a sentimental novel.¹⁷ Orphaned at an early age, Rachel and Camilla Warrington were taken in by their wealthy aunt, Suzannah Riddell. Camilla was “pretty enough to have been a belle,” sharp of wit, and thoroughly indulged by her aunt and uncle.¹⁸ Indeed, Dr. George Riddell rewarded Camilla’s devotion by stipulating

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 1780, Letter No. 2, Ambler Family Papers.

¹⁷ Rachel Warrington, born on 20 January 1753, was twelve years older than Betsey Ambler (Landon C. Bell, comp., *Charles Parish, York County, Virginia: History and Registers* (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1932), 29.

¹⁸ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 10 January 1786, Letter No. 7, Ambler Family Papers.

in his will that she was to receive an additional five hundred pounds over the thousand he had already provided for each sister.¹⁹ Rachel, on the other hand, Ambler observed, “having no pretensions to beauty or *wit* had grown up unnoticed, by all, except her amiable and respected friend & Patron [Mrs. Riddell] who fondly hoped that her good humour & *notability* would amply supply the deficiencies.”²⁰

Raised in the shadow of her beautiful and clever sister, Rachel was an easy mark for the flattering attentions of a French vicomte who arrived in Yorktown with the French forces in 1780. The French officers won conquest after conquest in Yorktown—quite apart from their victory over the English. Even the staid Mildred Smith had not been completely immune to their charms. “There is something so flattering in the [att]entions of these elegant french officers,” she told Ambler, “and tho’ not one in them can speak a word of English, Yet their style of entertaining and their devotion to the Ladies of Yk. Is so flattering that almost any girl of 16 would be enchanted.—but,” she continued, recovering herself, “you know how little effect they can ever have on me.” But Smith’s ability to elude the spell cast by the French probably had less to do with her sober frame of mind than with her attraction to an Englishman. “Nor w’d [I ex]change one rational hours conversation with my Solid english B---d,” she boasted, “for all the *bagatells* these sprightly Frenchmen lavish daily in the town.”²¹

The Riddell home on the Palace Green in Williamsburg was a magnet for these

¹⁹ Dr. George Riddell, will, January 1779, in York County Records, Wills, and Inventories Book 22, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 452-53.

²⁰ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 10 January 1786, Letter No. 7, Ambler Family Papers. In the eighteenth century, “notability” referred to excellence in housekeeping.

²¹ Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1780, Letter No. 1, *ibid.*

officers.²² The widow Riddell and her “charming” nieces captivated Louis Francois Bertrand dupont d’Aubevoue, comte de Lauberdriere, nephew and aide-de-camp to the comte de Rochambeau, commander of the French ground forces.²³ Another frequent visitor was the “viscount” of Ambler’s letters, none other than Donatien Marie Joseph de Vimeur, the son of Rochambeau, who also enjoyed the warm hospitality proffered by Yorktown and Williamsburg.

Unlike Smith, Rachel Warrington was not invulnerable to the charms of the Frenchmen, particularly the dashing Rochambeau. Succumbing to his attentions, trusting in his promises of marriage, Warrington “was not proof against [his] deep laid plans.”²⁴ As a result of their liaison, she bore a son, Lewis, in November 1782.²⁵ The vicomte departed Virginia the following January, leaving Warrington and her aunt “mortified and chagrined.” Three years later, Warrington was still waiting for him, “her credulity . . .

²² Widowed in 1779, Suzannah Riddell moved from Yorktown to what is now the Brush-Everard House on the Palace Green in Williamsburg, where she lived until her death sometime before year’s end 1785.

²³ Robert A. Selig, “Lauberdriere’s Journal,” *Colonial Williamsburg: The Journal of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation* 18 (Autumn 1995), 36. A 350-page journal kept by the comte de Lauberdriere, now in the Bibilothèque Nationale, contains a tantalizing reference to visits to the home of the widow Riddell: “Lodging with the Vicomte de Rochambeau my friend [and cousin], we took great advantage of the resources which this country offered and of the company of a widow named Madame Ridte, who had two charming nieces, Miss Rachel and Camilla Warrington. As the *chanson* says ‘let us make love, let us make war’ – these two occupations are filled with attraction. In fact, we tried to combine the one with the other, and our desires were fulfilled” (quoted in *ibid.*).

²⁴ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 10 January 1786, Letter No. 7, Ambler Family Papers.

²⁵ *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 19, 492.

imposed upon by [?] A hope that the Vis't would return and make an honorable woman of her."²⁶

As the betrayed women of the sentimental novel waited in vain, so too did Warrington. Mrs. Riddell's English nephew wrote to a contact at the French court, but the vicomte "seemed rather to avoid every thing that led to the subject appearing not to understand, at all."²⁷ Abandoning all hope, Warrington eventually married "an obscure man in her neighborhood." Ambler reflected that "perhaps this was the wisest [course?] she could take."²⁸

The end of Warrington's story is less grim than most sentimental novels in which the hapless woman dies in pathetic circumstances, forsaken by everyone she loves. Though publicly humiliated, Suzannah Riddell, her patron, did not desert Warrington or her infant. Ambler described Riddell's attempts both to "perform her duty and at the same time to preserve that dignity of character which so highly distinguished her." In spite of her own pain, she was "ever on her guard lest something should escape her that might wound the feelings of that poor deluded girl." Nor did Riddell abandon the child.

²⁶ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 10 January 1786, Letter No. 7, Ambler Family Papers. The vicomte sailed for France aboard *L'Emeraude* on 8 January 1783 (Warrington Dawson transcripts, vol. 1, memo 25, 16 March 1931, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

²⁷ Betsey Ambler to Frances Caines, 1787, Letter No. 6, Ambler Family Papers. Caines was Riddell's niece who lived in Bristol England. Ambler had met Caines when Caines visited her aunt in Virginia.

²⁸ Betsey Ambler to Frances Caines, 1792, *ibid.* Rachel Warrington married Richard Brown in December 1786. York County Records, Marriage Bonds, 10 December 1786, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Mary Beth Norton cites these same words to illustrate the plight of unwed mothers in a society governed by a rigid social code that was designed to protect the chastity of young women but was unforgiving of violations (Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 51-55). My interpretation softens Norton's.

“Oh her agony was indescribable [*sic*] whenever the sweet offending babe was brought into her presence,” Ambler recalled. “[s]ometimes with her eys [*sic*] shut she would kiss him, then send him away, and in a moment order that he might be brought back again.”²⁹

Indeed, after her initial reluctance to accept the infant, she began “to relent and has been frequently to her chamber and indeed when she imagined no one observed her embraced the child with great tenderness.”³⁰ At her death, she bequeathed the boy one thousand pounds to ensure that he would “receive every advantage that can be given him.”³¹

Also unwilling to add to Rachel Warrington’s sufferings, Ambler and Smith nonetheless drank deeply of the moral of her story. Smith smugly observed, “[N]otwithstanding you were of opinion that I was sometimes inclined to severity as to my strictures on Female Conduct particularly with regard to your old Friend R[ache]l yet the event has proved that I was right in congratul[at]ing you upon your good fortune in being removed from her infatuating power over you.” By her own admission, Smith possessed a “cool dispassionate temper,” and her judgment of Warrington was stern. “[S]he is indeed lost to every thing that is dear to Woman,” Smith moralized. “[W]ell might you say ‘how I hate the French’—but why blame the Viscount, had she but kept in View the dignity of her Sex—”³²

²⁹ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 10 January 1786, Letter No. 7, Ambler Family Papers.

³⁰ Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1782, Letter No. 4, *ibid.*

³¹ Betsey Ambler to Frances Caines, 1787, letter No. 6 (quotation), *ibid.*; Betsey Ambler to Frances Caines, November 1820, Letter No. 20, *ibid.*

³² Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1782, Letter No. 4 (first and third quotations); Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1780, Letter No. 1 (second quotation), Ambler Family Papers.

Smith clearly internalized the traditional advice literature embodied in a social code that placed the onus for restraint on women. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's study of women in New England between 1650 and 1750 has demonstrated how the reining of sexual behavior changed over that century from external controls to internal ones. The authority of the church and the county courts had begun to wane as early as 1700. By the 1790s, a new "system of repression based upon internalized guilt" was in place to govern the natures of men and women who persisted in their sinful ways. Carnal males required restraint, while physically vulnerable women succumbed all too easily to flattery and temptation.³³ Smith's refusal to find fault with the vicomte and her willingness to reproach Warrington instead show how this double standard was as thoroughly rooted in Virginia as in New England.

Smith did soften enough, however, to suggest that "had [Rachel Warrington] poor soul been blest with a mothers care in early life and been taught the heinousness of such a departure from Female rectitude all might yet have been well." Admitting her own empathy, Smith even encouraged Ambler to stop en route on her next visit to Yorktown to visit Warrington in Williamsburg. "let any one of us bring such an event to our own mind and realize her feelings," Smith urged. "[W]hat would become of us."³⁴ Ambler was less censorious. Although she thought Warrington a "picture . . . of Female weakness," her regard for the "former friendship that subsisted between us induces me to

³³ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (1982; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 103, 97.

³⁴ Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1782, Letter No. 4, Ambler Family Papers.

do every thing in my power to lessen her mortification.”³⁵ Ambler rejected Halifax’s advice that had instructed his readers in such a position to “make fair and quick retreat from such a mistaken acquaintance, else by moving too slowly from one that is so tainted, the contagion may reach you so far as to give you part of the scandal.” Even a spirited defense of a fallen friend, he had warned, could “incline the company to suspect you would not be so zealous if there was not a possibility that the case might be your own.”³⁶ In the face of such stringent pressure, the strength of the bonds of friendship does not suffice to explain why Betsey Ambler did not shun her unhappy friend.

Perhaps Ambler’s compassion for Warrington sprang from the uncomfortable truth in Smith’s observation: it could have happened to Ambler herself. Well could Betsey remember the fifteen-year-old who was “transported with delight at being considered a distinguished personage” at the ball given in her honor; “so much attention did your giddy friend receive as almost turned her poor distracted brain,” she had confessed to Smith.³⁷ More than once, Smith had voiced concern over Ambler’s “giddiness;” in 1782 she remonstrated with her over her “obstinate infatuation” with a young man who clearly did not meet with Jaquelin Ambler’s approval. “A thousand times have I wondered at the strange weakness of your conduct,” Smith scolded. “[I]t appears to me if left entirely to your own will you would not marry B---y and yet as if purposely to vex your Father, you have suffered this matter to go such lengths—when oh

³⁵ Betsey Ambler to Frances Caines, 1787, Letter No. 6, *ibid.*

³⁶ H.C. Foxcroft, ed., *The Life and Letters of Sir George Savile, Bart., First Marquis of Halifax* 2 vols. (New York: Longmas, Green & Co., 1898; reprint, Wilmington: Delaware Scholarly Resources, 1973), vol. 2, 414-415.

³⁷ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 1780, Letter No. 2, Ambler Family Papers.

when will you quit such trifling[?]" Those "juvenile extravagancies" Smith thought in need of "some restraint" could have led Ambler down the same path Warrington trod.³⁸

It was Smith herself, however, who explained why she and Ambler modified these notions of traditional advice literature and refused to shun a woman who had not lived up to its standards: Warrington, Smith thought, "is much to be pitied; when we reflect upon the disadvantages both herself and [sister have?] labored under, in being deprived of parents at least of a Mother [at a] very early age. What the plan of education adopted by their Father was before they came here, neither of us can remember, but certain [the course] pursued by their present patrons is a very erroneous one—appearance and *effect*, is everything—and really between ourselves it would seem as if every solid virtue was sacrificed to these."³⁹ Her reasoning followed that of "Cleora," who had written in the *Female Spectator* that "it would be cruel to charge the ladies with all the errors they commit. It is most commonly the fault of a wrong education, which makes them frequently do amiss."⁴⁰

It was Warrington's deficient education that was to blame and that prompted Ambler to characterize the vicomte and not her friend as "unprincipled."⁴¹ No one had shown Rachel Warrington how to thread her way through the ensnarements of the world. Her mother's death deprived her of maternal guidance; her father's death placed her in

³⁸ Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1782, Letter No. 4, *ibid.*

³⁹ Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, 1780, Letter No. 1, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Mary Priestley, ed., *The Female Spectator: Being Selections from Mrs. Eliza Heywood's Periodical (1744-1746)* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., 1929), 55-56.

⁴¹ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 10 January 1786, Letter No. 7, Ambler Family papers.

the hands of well-meaning though shallow patrons who valued “appearance, and *effect*.” The ornamental education Suzannah Riddell gave her young charges was ill-suited to the changing world of the revolutionary era. It was no wonder that, bereft of parental direction and ineptly guided by her patrons, Rachel became mesmerized by the exquisitely uniformed, titled French officers who visited her home, that she courted the delighted laughter of the old Count de R[ochambeau]” by “lisp[ing] a distorted french jargon gathered from old saws in the grammar,” and that she foolishly believed such superficial attentions bespoke love.⁴²

Neither Ambler nor Smith was ever willing to abjure their friendship with Warrington. Although Smith kept a greater distance from her, even she did not blame Warrington exclusively. Neither girl condemned Warrington out of hand for the failure of her patrons to perform their duty. “True parents,” according to John Locke’s formulation, took seriously their responsibility to raise their children in Jay Fliegelman’s words, in “rational self-sufficiency and habits of right conduct.”⁴³ The ornamental accomplishments (needlework, music, and dancing) in which the Warrington girls were skilled only reinforced their innocence and left them woefully unprepared to enter the world.

A correspondent to the *Female Spectator* had argued that men should teach young girls that “dress and show are not the essentials of a fine lady, and that true beauty is seated in the mind.”⁴⁴ Clearly, Ambler and Smith subscribed to this view regarding

⁴² Carrington, “Variety,” p. 11.

⁴³ Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 14-15.

⁴⁴ Priestly, ed., *The Female Spectator*, 56.

ornamental education and were not prepared to reject Warrington. In their steadfastness they presaged readers of the early national period, whose reading of sentimental novels empowered their sense of self and their right to choose for themselves. Ambler and Smith lived during turbulent times, however; social and ideological revolutions accompanied the political one that had brought the war to their doorsteps. Old and new advices clashed as well. Although the new advice allowed Ambler and Smith to explain Rachel Warrington's fall in different terms, the old style forced Ambler to concede that, no matter what good qualities a woman might possess, they were nothing "without that precious virtue: discretion, which once dispensed with leaves a woman prey to every trifling seducer."⁴⁵

Ambler's and Smith's correspondence shows the seriousness with which they imbibed the lessons the novels offered. Watching Warrington, they could not help but see how life had imitated art, nor could they help but be affected by the tragic confirmation of the literature's truth: Rachel and Lewis Warrington were living proof of the consequences of naivete, "female weakness," and surrender to flattery and empty promises. Even so, the young women were bound neither by traditional advice nor the prescriptive plot of the sentimental novel: they did not abandon their friend. Instead, the story they lived took a different tack. They turned the traditional wisdom of the innately solicitous nature of "the Sex" to their own purposes by absolving not a husband, but a female friend, of an offense Halifax could never have forgiven. They embraced both

⁴⁵ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 10 January 1786, Letter No. 7, Ambler Family Papers.

Warrington and the lessons of her experience and so concluded the story, not with an image of despair, but of female friendship and compassion.

Years later, as Eliza Ambler Brent Carrington perused her juvenile letters, she began to transform the story in which she and Smith had been so absorbed into a novel entitled *Variety or the vicissitudes of Long life*. Reflecting the seamlessness in life and art, her characters bore only the most diaphanous of disguises; it is clear they are the same people who populated her letters. In the opening pages we meet the venerable customs collector, Mr. Anselmore; his nervous and frail wife, Rebecca; the good Scots Tory Dr. R---lle and his “stately lady”; the “gentle modest friend” Mildred; the “wild extravagant ‘Jaquelina’ ”; and the Walpole girls, the orphaned children of a destitute minister from Hampton. Change is in the air as Mr. Anselmore denounces the “pernicious weed,” tea, and applauds the actions of rebellious Bostonians; as Dr. R---lle and his wife, unable to foresee how the unrest will end, prudently take “*Silence*” for their motto; and as the whole town of York is “in an uprour.—Many voices exclaiming at once,—*Powder, Magazine*, and the odious name of *Dunmore* so bl[end]ed, that it . . . augured no good.”⁴⁶

Carrington also introduced the splendid French officers who so endeared themselves to the local populace that even Dr. R---lle, with his Tory leanings, “almost lost sight of their being *French*, a people who till then he had viewed with national horror.” They devised “every sort of amusement . . . to enchant the Young, and even the Older, at least some amongst them, would occasionally partake of them.”⁴⁷ Mr. and Mrs.

⁴⁶ Carrington, “*Variety*,” pp. 1-4, 11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Anselmore, however, “were never found” at these diversions, no doubt to protect their daughters from such giddy frivolity and its attendant dangers. Indeed, any association with the French officers occurred in the Anselmore home, where the father’s watchful eye “never lost sight of his daughters in a mixed and gay company.” He watched also with growing dismay the flirtatious behavior of Camilla and “R---l” Walpole as they charmed the comte de Rochambeau with their attempts at French, and he “did not solicit a repetition of their visit when the company dispersed.”⁴⁸ Generous and well-intentioned though Dr. R---lle may have been, Anselmore worried about his wards, “good looking girls enough,” he observed to his wife, “if these good [*stricken*] old people do not spoil them in their romantic notions of taking in destitute children.”⁴⁹

Mr. Anselmore’s resolute patriotism contrasted sharply with Dr. R---lle’s more flexible Toryism. Highly principled in matters both public and private, Anselmore used his position as collector of customs to “keep a strict eye upon arrivals” (namely the hated tea), enforced the ban on tea in his own household, and served on Jefferson’s Council during the war. Dr. R---lle, although professing dismay that the colonists “seem to have quite forgot themselves and their duty,” nonetheless forgot his loyalties when he hosted his hated enemies, the French, in his own home. On these occasions, his wards assiduously provided “all the comforts and elegancies suited to *French taste*.”⁵⁰

Eliza Carrington never completed her novel. Yet it was clear to her that the story recounted in the letters of her girlhood was the stuff of which novels were made. As she

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 2, 10.

read and re-read her correspondence, she herself was transformed from reader to producer of a story she felt compelled to write. It was surely no coincidence that she chose the genre beloved by young women of the early republic to bequeath the hard-won lessons of the Revolution from her generation to the next. Indeed, her attempt to fashion her own work of fiction demonstrates her faith in novels, both as a legitimate literary form and as an effective way to communicate important moral lessons to her young nieces.

In the end, however, she allowed a letter of November 1820 to her friend, Frances Caines in England, to serve as the denouement of the novel she never finished. Rachel's son Lewis Warrington, she wrote proudly, was "hailed as one of the choicest guardians of his country" after the War of 1812, during which he had served as captain of his own ship. She continued, "It was impossible for me to describe the Emotions produced in my mind when I heard every voice unanimous in commen[da]tion and in rapture describe his modesty . . . as he entered the Senate Hall [of the Virginia state legislature], to receive his merited award."⁵¹

It is possible that Rachel Warrington lived long enough to see her son so honored; Lewis had remained at home "after the last War with England . . . his Mother dying about that time." Certainly she saw him become the man whose conduct Carrington described as "distinguished" in both his naval career and in his private life. Though he lived on "moderate Pay from our Government," after his mother's death he "nobly divided" his

⁵¹ Eliza Ambler Brent Carrington to Frances Caines, November 1820, Letter No. 20, Ambler Family Papers. Warrington was awarded a medal by Congress and a presentation sword by the Commonwealth of Virginia.

inheritance from Suzannah Riddell with Rachel's impoverished stepdaughters.⁵² His loyalty to his mother's memory spurred him to reject the overtures of the vicomte to recognize his paternity in the wake of the son's war decorations. Instead, Warrington "declar[ed] that he would never acknowledge as his father the man, who had dishonoured his mother, and whose parental feelings had slumbered while he was in obscurity awakening for the first time when he had won fame and rank by his own exertions."⁵³

It was a fitting closure to a tale of a highly principled patriarch, well-intentioned though inept patrons, impressionable young girls, dashing French officers, and an

⁵² Ibid. On Lewis Warrington's relationship with his mother, see P. Davenport to Elizabeth Pelham, 14 June 1791, in "Letters Addressed to Miss Elizabeth Pelham, William Blagrove and William Pelham," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2d. ser., 9 (1929), 269-270.

⁵³ "Sketches and Reminiscences of the Dabney and Morris Families for Maria L. Carrington from her affectionate father John B. Dabney," 1850, p. 8, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. Some question of Warrington's paternity has arisen in the pages of *Colonial Williamsburg*. Based on a letter from Lucy Randolph (later Latil) to Comte Christian de Deux-Ponts in which Randolph asserted that Rachel named her son "Louis after his father Monsieur Lobidier," Robert A. Selig has concluded that Lauberdier was the father (Selig, "Lauberdier's Journal," 36). Joanne B. Young, responding to Selig's essay, has noted that John Blair Dabney's account also raises questions about the identity of Lewis Warrington's father. The vicomte de Rochambeau, who succeeded to his father's title in 1807, was mortally wounded at the battle of Leipzig in October 1813 and was dead at the time of the alleged overtures. Lauberdier died childless in 1837; whether it was he who contacted Warrington is unknown. It may also be possible that Dabney's account is but a family tradition, a proud ending to a tale of "mortification." The correspondence upon which it is based has never been located. See "The Freshest Advices," *Colonial Williamsburg* 18 (1995-96), 6-7. Ambler, however, referred to the father of Warrington's child as "V—t R—u," that is, the vicomte de Rochambeau (Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 10 January 1786, Letter No. 7, Ambler Family Papers). Because Ambler was both explicit and consistent, over the entire course of her correspondence, in her assertions of the guilt of the vicomte de Rochambeau, and because the internal evidence of the letters suggests a warm, though not necessarily intimate, friendship with Rachel, I accept Betsey's identification because she was in a position to know the truth. With respect to the argument advanced in this case study, however, the material point is that the father was a dashing young aristocratic French officer; whether it was Rochambeau or Lauberdier, although a point of interest, is not important.

illegitimate child; of trust betrayed, compassion embraced, and lessons learned. Though often tempted to consign to the flames those girlhood letters that told the tale, Eliza Carrington refrained from doing so and saved them for her sister Ann and Ann's daughters.⁵⁴ Earmarked for the women of the family, the experiences and lessons of the revolutionary generation of young women were preserved both in the mature Eliza's novelized introduction to the story and in the lively compassion of the letters of the spirited young Betsey.

II: "A follower of the Lamb": Hannah Lee Corbin

Hannah Lee Corbin, of the illustrious Lee family of Virginia, offers a case study showing how another gentry woman coped with the constraints of her world in ways that tied together themes of both religious and sentimental advice. A woman who defies attempts at categorization, Corbin read novels avidly, publicly deserted the established Anglican Church for the Baptist, and took a live-in lover with whom she had two children, yet through it all retained the love of her brothers and the respect of her neighborhood. She was a complicated woman: deeply religious, eminently practical, and unquestionably headstrong. She neither flouted convention, nor let it subdue her. Drawn to the moral lessons of novels that dealt with questions of love, marriage, identity, adultery, and honor, Corbin ignored the vociferous condemnations of novels by both religious and secular authorities, and ordered at least a dozen novels between 1764 and 1772.

She was a wealthy woman who could afford to indulge her taste for fine things. Her father was Thomas Lee, president of the Governor's council and the builder of

⁵⁴ Eliza Ambler Brent Carrington to Ann Ambler Fisher, 11 March 1823, Ambler Family Papers.

Stratford Hall, one of the finest plantation homes in colonial Virginia. Embarrassed by his own lack of formal education, Lee amassed a substantial library, sent his three sons to England, and provided tutors for all his children at Stratford Hall.⁵⁵ A single bound volume in Hannah Lee Corbin's hand survives. Almost three hundred pages long by itself, it is labeled volume four of a "Book of Sermons," and begins on page 563. It is a series of letters considering theological questions of varying degrees of importance.⁵⁶ Internal evidence suggests it is an Anglican treatise. No date appears on the document, but it is likely that Corbin copied it during the course of her girlhood education.

Hannah Lee married well. Gawen Corbin was a justice of the peace in Westmoreland County, a member of the House of Burgesses, and later of the Council. In the autumn of 1747 he brought his bride to his estate of Peckatone, twenty miles down river from Stratford Hall.⁵⁷ Little is known of their marriage; they had one daughter, Martha. In 1759, at age thirty-one, Hannah Corbin became a widow. Corbin's will bequeathed to his wife all of his estate which was to be divided in half upon their

⁵⁵ Paul C. Nagel, *The Lees of Virginia: Seven Generations of an American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 39; Ethel Armes, *Stratford Hall: The Great House of the Lees* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1936), 91-95. Armes argues that Lee's library was so extensive that his son, Richard Henry Lee, acquired the equivalent of a university education from immersing himself in it. William Sommerville, who bought Stratford Hall, offered to sell the contents of its "three or four thousand volume" library to Thomas Jefferson in January 1825. Unfortunately, he did not identify all the books before the library was dispersed. Jefferson Papers of University of Virginia, 1732-1828, Main Series III, Microfilm Roll 10 (1825-1828).

⁵⁶ Volumes one through three are lost. The surviving book, volume four, begins on page 563 and finishes on page 860. The letters deal with matters such as the nature of original sin and free will, to proving that Judas was not at the Lord's Supper. The book resides in the library collections at Stratford Hall; it was discovered at Peckatone in the 1880s, before the house was destroyed by fire.

⁵⁷ Nagel, *Lees of Virginia*, 55.

daughter's marriage. If Martha married before age twenty-one or without the approval of his executors, however, she would receive one shilling. And, in his final decree, Corbin forbade the remarriage of his widow, under pain of losing all but one third of the estate.⁵⁸

Thus far, the evidence on Hannah Corbin is clear; it becomes considerably less so during her widowhood. She fell in love with physician Richard Hall who attended her husband in his last illness. Although Hall owned a small estate in nearby Fauquier County, he came to live at Peckatone with Corbin. Their first child, Elisha Hall Corbin, was born in March 1763, followed by a second, a daughter, also named Martha.⁵⁹ There is no record of a marriage between Corbin and Hall, but of course, a legal marriage in the colony would have deprived Corbin of a portion of her legacy. For the rest of her life, she signed her name, "Hannah Corbin, Widow."

Complicating the story further still is the murky issue of Corbin's conversion to the growing Baptist sect. Baptist histories claim that Hall was already a Baptist and that he and Corbin were married in a Baptist ceremony, a marriage that would not have been legally recognized in Anglican Virginia.⁶⁰ Others, citing her feisty spirit, have argued

⁵⁸ Westmoreland County Deeds and Wills 13, page 265-67, State Library of Virginia. Corbin's will is quoted in full in Edmund Jennings Lee, *Lee of Virginia, 1642-1892* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1974; originally published 1895), 87-88. How common a practice it was for husbands to impose limitations on their wives' widowhoods, was addressed by Joan Gunderson and Gwen Victor Gampel in "Married Women's Legal Status in Eighteenth-Century New York and Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 39 (1982), 114-134. In Gunderson's Virginia sample for 1700-1780, six percent of husbands imposed penalties for their widows' remarriage.

⁵⁹ Ethel Armes notes that it was customary in eighteenth-century Virginia to use the same baptismal names when there were different fathers or mothers. Armes, *Stratford Hall*, 212.

⁶⁰ L. Rees Watkins, "They Made it Happen" [76pp.] (Richmond: Baptist General Association of Virginia, 1974), 5. Watkins asserts that "much proof indicates that

that Corbin thumbed her nose at Northern Neck society and her husband's wishes, living without the benefit of marriage with the man of her choice after Gawen Corbin's death.⁶¹

There is no proof that Hall was ever a member of a Baptist community; nor, before 1771, a record of Corbin's membership. There is plenty of evidence later in the 1770s of Corbin's Baptist affiliation, but dating her conversion to support the theory of a Baptist marriage is troublesome. Both she and Hall were cited by a grand jury for non-attendance at the Anglican church in 1764. This may indicate Baptist sympathies, but there is no hard evidence that they converted as early as 1762, although it is certainly possible. David Thomas, a well-educated, talented Baptist preacher had moved from Pennsylvania to Fauquier County in the Northern Neck. There he founded Broad Run Church in 1762.⁶² That twenty-three people were baptized the day after its organization suggests an interest in the Baptist church which Corbin might have shared.⁶³

Thomas's evangelism in Corbin's neighborhood brought forth much fruit. Broad

Hannah Corbin and Richard Hall had a perfectly moral dissenter's marriage ceremony." Nagel also follows the Baptist line, describing Hall as one of the "Northern Neck's early converts." Nagel, *Lees of Virginia*, 56.

⁶¹ Paul Verduin, "New Light on Hannah Lee Corbin," speech to the Lee Family Society, June 1995; Armes, *Stratford Hall*, 209-11; Louise Belote Dawe and Sandra Gioia Treadway, "Hannah Lee Corbin: The Forgotten Lee," *Virginia Calvalcade*, Autumn 1979, 73.

⁶² Hall owned property in Fauquier County before moving to Peckatone. Dawe and Treadway, "Hannah Lee Corbin," 74; Nagel, *The Lees of Virginia*, 57. On the work and influence of David Thomas see Robert B. Semple, *The History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia* (Richmond: Pitt & Dickinson, 1894), 378-90; Lewis Peyton Little, *Imprisoned Preachers and Religious Liberty in Virginia* (Lynchburg: J.P. Bell Co., Inc., 1938), 38-9; Garnett Ryland, *The Baptists of Virginia, 1699-1926* (Richmond: Virginia Baptist Board of Missions and Education, 1955), 15-36.

⁶³ John S. Moore and William L. Lumpkin, *Meaningful Moments in Virginia Baptist Life, 1715-1972* (Prepared for the Sesquicentennial Celebration of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, 1973), 7.

Run Church spawned many smaller congregations, most notably for this account, Chappawamsic Baptist Church and its offshoot, Potomac Church.⁶⁴ Founded in 1771, the members of Potomac Baptist Church set out their covenant with their God and one another and the clerk affixed their names to the register. The ninth name is that of Hannah Hall. Here, within the Baptist community, Corbin used the name she used nowhere else. It appears as a quiet affirmation of her marriage and status as Hall's wife by a congregation that punished by excommunication far lesser sins than fornication.⁶⁵ Since the Anglican establishment in colonial Virginia did not recognize the legality of a Baptist marriage, Corbin would have avoided the consequences of remarriage under her dead husband's will. Further evidence suggests that Corbin did indeed marry Hall: in 1780, when Virginia recognized dissenter marriages, Corbin changed their children's names to Hall.

So rather than understanding Corbin as flouting the conventional standards of a patriarchal system, it is perhaps more accurate to see her as trying to find a way to live within its strictures. Gawen Corbin's attempt to extend beyond the grave his authority over his wife was possible in a society that believed in the natural superiority of male over female. And for all of Hannah Corbin's intelligence, vigor, and skill in managing her estates during her widowhood, there is no evidence that she ever disputed ideas of

⁶⁴ Register, Chappawamsic Baptist Church, Stafford County, Virginia, Minute Books, 1766-1919 2 volumes, Virginia Historical Society. Register, Hartwood Baptist Church, Potomac Association (organized 1771 as Potomac Church), Virginia Baptist Historical Society. Both churches were in Stafford County.

⁶⁵ For example, on 10 June 1775 the congregation excluded Hugh Black who was accused of "drinking to excess from time to time." On 8 March 1776 William Weeks, accused of "wrangling, quarreling, and attempting to fight his neighbors," was also excluded. Register, Hartwood Baptist Church.

female inferiority. An exchange between Corbin and her brother Richard Henry Lee proves the point. It is Corbin's most famous letter, yet it is one that has been lost. We know of it through the reply written by her brother in March 1778. Corbin had apparently complained bitterly about being a victim of taxation without representation. Although a property-holding widow, she was excluded from the right to vote for the officers who assessed property values. Although Lee allowed that neither "wisdom [nor] policy" should prohibit property-holding widows from voting, he thought it "out of character for women to press into those tumultuous assemblages of men where the business of choosing representatives is conducted." Because of Richard Lee's letter, however, Corbin has been cited as the "first woman in Virginia concerned in women's rights." However, Corbin protested against unfair taxation, not contemporary views of gender.⁶⁶

Nor did her new church overturn ideas of feminine inferiority. David Thomas himself, defending Baptist preaching as "agreeable both to Scripture and to reason," directed that "wives submit to their husbands . . . as far as their commands do consist with the word of God in all things."⁶⁷ Corbin's conversion allowed her to be true to her conscience in a way that also yielded the joy of a second family life.

None of the foregoing suggests that Corbin's conversion was merely a way

⁶⁶ Quoted in Armes, *Stratford Hall*, 208, 209.

⁶⁷ David Thomas, "The Virginian Baptist," (Baltimore: Enoch story, 1774) in L. F. Greene, ed., *The Writings of John Leland* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 58. This formulation is similar to Anglican Richard Allestree's advice to wives one hundred years earlier when he quoted "the apostle [Paul], Col. iii 18, Wives submit yourselves to your own Husbands, as it is fit in the Lord." [Richard Allestree], *Whole Duty of Man* (London: 1677; reprint, London: 1842), 260.

around Gawen's will. Virginia Baptists endured persecution during this period. Her choice to join them required courage and it must have pained her that her conversion to the Baptists occasioned some grief among her family members.⁶⁸ Her youngest brother Arthur, then in London, had pleaded with their brother, Richard Henry, to try to reclaim her, "to lure her to herself" and bring her back to her senses.⁶⁹

Although her move from the established church to a persecuted dissenting one appears to have been a sharp break, it may well have been instead a logical outgrowth of a devout Anglicanism. The total length of her copy of the "Book of Sermons" was 860 pages. Corbin probably copied it during her girlhood as part of her education. Since it was found at Peckatone in the 1880s, it is likely that she brought it there as a bride, another clear indication of the significance of her Anglicanism to her. The beliefs of the Regular Baptists, the group to which Thomas and Corbin belonged, tended more toward Arminianism than to the Calvinism of the Separate Baptists.⁷⁰ There were also degrees of difference in the intensity of their worship. Of the Regulars, John Leland [1754-1841],

⁶⁸ See Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (reprinted New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 162-63; Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, 41-71; Ryland, *Baptists of Virginia*, 60-91; Semple, *Rise and Progress of Baptists*, 29-54; Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 270-73; Robert Carter's "List of places preachers, and texts. 14 Sep. 1777 – 4 Jul 1779," Robert Carter Papers, Duke University, vol. 12. Xerox copy of typescript, Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

⁶⁹ See Chapter 3 for quotation from letter of November 1761, quoted by Paul Verduin. Verduin believes that Arthur Lee's distress was occasioned by his sister's illicit liaison with Hall. Yet for Corbin's traditional Anglican brother, the issues of her marriage and conversion were probably inseparable.

⁷⁰ McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 204-06, 229-34. Arminianism, following the teachings of Jacobus Arminius, a seventeenth-century Dutch theologian, favored a theology of free will, emphasized sacramental worship, and rejected the doctrine of predestination which was so central to Calvinism. Barry Coward, *The Stuart Age* (New York: Longman, 1980), 98.

a noted Baptist preacher and writer, observed, “the work [worship] was solemn and rational; but the Separates were the most zealous and the work among them was very noisy.”⁷¹ For Hannah Corbin then, the Regular Baptists may have offered not only intellectual compatibility and the solemnity of worship with which she was already familiar, but also a more intense spirituality that fed her soul.

There is no evidence that, materially, Corbin lived any differently after her conversion. Indeed, there is much to show that she continued to live luxuriously, rather than simply. Her accounts show debits for fine fabrics, coffees, wines, china, and the like.⁷² And it is only one of the many puzzles of Corbin’s life that, during precisely the years 1764-1772 in which her conversion occurred, she continued to order the latest novels. This indulgence ran counter to both the dominant male literary culture and the dissenting religious one that condemned many such idle gentry pastimes. Novels inflamed passions to which women were already susceptible, and against which, given

⁷¹ Ibid., 230. This distinction was more marked in the South than north; but even in the South, the Regulars and Separates were able to unite, although not until 1787, after Corbin’s death.

⁷² Accounts, Peckatone Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

their natural physical and mental weaknesses, they had no defense.⁷³ But women read these books seriously; indeed, they read their own lives into them.⁷⁴

A quick sample of Corbin's readings underscores this point. She ordered *The History of Charlotte Summers*, a tale of an orphaned girl who, preserving her virtue through a series of perilous situations before discovering the truth of her birth and rank, was reunited with her father and happily anticipated the reward of marriage with the man of her choice.⁷⁵ *True Merit, True Happiness* is the autobiography of a rather rakish man who tells of his misadventures with women until finally he marries respectably and finds true happiness: the point of the story, as we are given to understand by its title.⁷⁶

Particularly intriguing is *The History of a Lady of Distinction*, the story of a young woman who, through a series of letters, relies upon the judgment of her mother to

⁷³ Thomas Laqueur discusses the transformation of understanding about sex and gender, from the one-sex model that prevailed until the seventeenth century to the discovery of the internal, organic differences between men and women. Once this discovery was made, all the cultural understandings of female nature now had a foundation in the unchangeable biology of female anatomy. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 64

⁷⁴ Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: the Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 73. I treat these themes also in Catherine Kerrison, "By the Book: Eliza Ambler Brent Carrington and Conduct Literature in Late Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 105, No. 1 (Winter 1997), 27-52.

⁷⁵ *The History of Charlotte Summers, The Fortunate Parish Girl*. In Two volumes. London: Printed for the Author; Sold by Corbett, the Publisher, at Addison's Head, in Fleet Street. (1750) (sometimes attributed to Sarah Fielding).

⁷⁶ *True Merit, True Happiness; Exemplified in the Entertaining and Instructive Memoirs of Mr. S--*. In Two Volumes. London: Printed for Francis Noble, at Otway's Head, in King's Street, Covent-Garden; and John Noble, at Dryden's Head, in St. Martin's Court, near Leicester-Square. (1757) The price for this book was six shillings, bound.

guide her through the trials of the marriage arranged for her by her father.⁷⁷ Her husband, the Marquis “de ***,” takes her from her “peaceable and innocent life” at home to the worldliness of his court life. Dismayed that the “pride of his rank, the lustre of his riches and the seduction of company, have obscured a thousand good qualities,” the new marchioness asks her mother how she might awaken those “happy dispositions which are only laid to sleep.” Her mother’s advice was familiar to all eighteenth-century readers: “Your first care ought to be to win the heart of your husband . . . Shew him daily, and in the smallest matters, that you have no greater satisfaction than in obeying him.”⁷⁸

Letters continued to fly between the mother and daughter in the tale, as the marchioness became more deeply entangled in the affairs -quite literally- at court. Her husband’s best friend, a count, fell in love with her. She discovered her husband’s adultery with a young girl she had taken in for charity. She feared for the safety and virtue of a sister who had joined her. Again her mother directed her, with familiar advice, to ignore her husband’s dalliances. She assured her daughter of his love (after all, had he not attempted to keep the knowledge of his affair from her?), and urged her to behave in all ways virtuously so that all would turn out well.⁷⁹

In fact, throughout her letters, the marchioness had attempted to apply the principles of religion that had always guided her, to this new life with the marquis, but she despaired of the theological virtues of court, of which “hypocrisy [was] the most

⁷⁷ *The History of a Young Lady of Distinction. In a Series of Letters. In Two Volumes.* London: Printed for F. Noble, at his Circulating Library, in King Street, Covent Garden; and J. Noble, at his Circulating Library in St. Martin’s Court, near Leicester Square. (1754).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5, 8, 11-12.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

prevailing.” For some people, religion was indeed merely a “masque,” her mother sympathized in reply. But the marchioness’s next letter showed how seriously her mother misunderstood the court. Relating an account of a notorious hired assassin who conducted business and eluded arrest from the refuge of a church, the marchioness showed that religion did not even have the status of a “masque;” it was held in complete contempt.⁸⁰

Hannah Corbin’s life certainly did not have the high drama of the marchioness’s life; nor did life in eighteenth-century Virginia resemble life at the court of Turin. Or did it? Much has been made of the worldliness of Anglican Virginian culture: how the established Church propped up the gentry’s social, economic, and political dominance; how Anglican clerics danced, drank, gambled, and worse; how Sunday worship was a social occasion rather than a spiritual one.⁸¹ How much more godly was life in the gentry circles of Virginia than in the aristocratic ones of Turin?

Within their respective secular worlds, the two women faced similar dilemmas in terms of reconciling the desire for love and the obligations of family life, with their own religious imperatives. The high-minded marchioness struggled with her husband’s adultery, worrying less about its consequences for her, than about “the injury he does himself.”⁸² Stricken as she read one of her husband’s love letters to his mistress, she

⁸⁰ Ibid., 80-81, 87.

⁸¹ Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 58-65; Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986); Hunter Dickinson Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, 1773-1774* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 5th ed., 1993), xxxi, 137, 167.

⁸² *History of a Young Lady of Distinction*, 161.

realized that he had not loved her, his own wife, with such passion.⁸³ Yet she never succumbed to the corrupting influence of life at court to retaliate. Clinging always to the advice of her mother, to “expect his return to his duty at the hand of God,” she prayed to find a way to recapture her errant husband’s love.⁸⁴

Corbin never wrote about the books that she ordered from London; how she saw the parallels between her life and that of the marchioness can only be speculated upon from a two-hundred year distance. Well-placed within the Virginia aristocracy, Corbin could empathize with the temptations of mammon and the flesh. She may well have recognized the passions described within the fictional world; after all, she lived with Hall and had two children with him. The “young lady of distinction” showed how faith and goodness could prevail, even in such a godless place as Turin. She could have been a powerful example to Corbin, of an educated, aristocratic woman whose marriage was of critical importance, who lived in and was of the world, but who kept God at the center of her life.

Hannah Lee Corbin was also a woman for whom religion was more than form. That it had substance for her is borne out by the fact that she hosted Baptist meetings at her plantation in spite of threats of violence; that she raised her children in her newfound faith; and that she could write joyfully to her sister that, “I believe that most people that are not of that profession [Baptist] are perswaded that we are either Enthusiasts or Hypocrites. But my dear Sister, the followers of the Lamb have been ever esteemed so.

⁸³ Ibid., 215.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 168.

This is our comfort.”⁸⁵ As the marchioness showed how to cling to faith in a faithless world, so Hannah Lee Corbin, a woman who fits comfortably into no mold, did the same. Her faith, her family, and her fiction mutually supported her as she sought new spiritual and family lives within the constraints of her eighteenth-century society. Her faith, her family, and her fiction mutually supported her as she sought new spiritual and family lives within the constraints of her eighteenth-century world.

III: Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Pamela

One of the few women who wrote directly about their reading was Eliza Lucas (later wife of Charles Pinckney) of South Carolina. An exceptional young woman, Lucas had the charge of her father’s six-hundred-acre plantation of Wappoo at the age of sixteen, when her father was called to military service in 1739. Educated in England before settling in South Carolina, she incorporated reading into her daily schedule, rising at five in the morning and reading out of her father’s library until seven.⁸⁶ Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, published in 1740 and immediately in vogue on both sides of the Atlantic, had not escaped Lucas’s notice. Returning the volume she had borrowed, Lucas used the opportunity to critique the book. In a paradoxical mix of outspoken criticism and feminine deference, she illustrated the ways in which the various forms of conduct-of-life literature shaped her thinking about herself, women’s capacities generally, and

⁸⁵ Letter, undated (although probably 1780), Hannah Corbin to Alice Lee Shippen, Shippen Family Papers, Library of Congress. Chapter 3 contains a fuller quotation from this letter.

⁸⁶ Letter, Eliza Lucas to Mary Bartlett, n.d., spring 1742. Elise Lucas Pinkney, *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, 1739-1762* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), xv-xvi, 34. See also “Eliza Pinckney and Republican Motherhood,” in Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994), 50-62.

proper feminine behavior.

Lucas engaged the character of Pamela first, speaking of her as she would an acquaintance. "She is a good girl and as such I love her dearly," she began, taking Pamela and her story into her own experience as Cathy Davidson has argued readers later in the century did.⁸⁷ "But I must think her very defective and even blush for her while she allows her self that disgusting liberty of praising her self [by] repeating all the fine speeches made to her by others," she continued, in a mirror reflection of traditional writers on feminine modesty. It would have been much better if the source of Pamela's praises had "come from some other hand," Lucas believed.⁸⁸

Kevin Hayes has argued that Lucas's comments were focused upon the literary device of this point, and indeed, begging indulgence for her "presumption for instructing one so farr above my own level as the Authour of Pamella," she nonetheless proceeded to advise the author on ways to accomplish the same end, without placing the offensively self-serving words in Pamela's mouth.⁸⁹ Barely twenty, Lucas was taking on a formidable writer in Samuel Richardson and she knew it. No sooner had she pointed out his deficiency than she "acquit[ted]" him. "He designed to paint no more than a woman," she excused him, "and he certainly designed it as a reflection upon the vanity of our sex that a character so compleat in every other instance should be so greatly defective in

⁸⁷ Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, 73.

⁸⁸ Letter, Lucas to Bartlett, n.d. , June or July 1742 in *ibid.*, 47-8.

⁸⁹ Kevin Hayes, *Colonial Woman's Bookshelf* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 105-108.

this." In so doing, she thought Richardson had made the character true to "nature . . . for had his Heroine no defect the character must be unnatural."⁹⁰

While Hayes is correct in pointing to Lucas's astute literary criticism, he overlooks a more interesting aspect of her reaction to *Pamela*. Pamela is both creature of Richardson's fertile imagination and real friend to Lucas. However much she critiqued Richardson's literary creation, showing that she could distinguish between fiction and reality, Lucas nonetheless found Pamela to be very real. "I love her dearly," Lucas wrote immediately in her letter to Bartlett. Passionate in her censure of Pamela's unfortunate proclivity to sing her own praises, Lucas ached to counsel her. Did Pamela not realize that those compliments could have been the fond phrases of very partial friends? Or perhaps, Lucas suggested further from her own experience, they were meant "with a view to encourage her and make her aspire after those qualifications which were ascribed to her." In any event, Lucas responded with the compassionate wisdom of a friend to a fictional character in a way reminiscent of tearful visitors at the turn of the nineteenth century who sought the grave of the fictional Charlotte Temple in the yard of New York's Trinity Church.

So real was Pamela to Lucas, that she emboldened Lucas's critique of Richardson. "I have run this farr before I was aware for I have nither capacity or inclination for Criticism," she confessed, "tho' Pamela sets me the example by criticizing Mr. Lock [John Locke] and has taken the liberty to dissent from that admirable Author."⁹¹ That a woman in print should dissent from the Oxford-educated philosopher was inspiration

⁹⁰ Letter, Lucas to Bartlett, June or July 1742, *Letterbook*, 47-8.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

enough for Lucas; it mattered little that she was a fiction. In spite of Pamela's lapse into female vanity, she had been lauded for the virtue that strengthened her resistance to the persistent Mr. B. The printed words of a virtuous woman carried within them the power that freed Lucas to speak her mind, at least for a few lines of her letter.

Lucas was no stranger herself to Locke's work. In a letter to her friend Mrs. Pinckney, she had reflected on the inability of plantation life to soothe her "pensive humor" after a particularly gay whirl about Charles Town. She "found the change not in the place but in my self . . . I was forced to consult Mr. Locke over and over to see wherein personal Identity consisted." Eager that her name-dropping not be misinterpreted, Lucas assured her correspondent that she did not quote Locke to "affect to appear learned," but merely to let Mr. Pinckney know with "what regard I pay to Mr. Pinckney's recommendation of Authors."⁹² Lucas appreciated Pamela's courage and appropriated some of it for herself, but she carefully balanced her opinions with the deferential language of respectable femininity. It is particularly significant that Lucas couched her remarks in such modesty within a letter to a female friend. Acknowledging her intellectual deficiencies to a male who was (by divine and natural imperatives) her superior was one thing, for it followed a culturally required convention. Here, however, Lucas carried the convention over into female correspondence as well. Mary Bartlett was the visiting English niece of Mrs. Charles Pinckney and Lucas had begun writing to her after meeting her in Charles Town in January 1742.⁹³ The newness of the acquaintance

⁹² Eliza Lucas to Mrs. Charles Pinckney, n.d. (approximately 1741), Pinckney, ed., *Letterbook*, 19. Lucas was a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Pinckney. After Mrs. Pinckney's death, Lucas married Pinckney in what was considered a very desirable match. The editor of the *Letterbook* speculates that Lucas referred to Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding." Ibid.

might well account for her form and decorum, yet what is striking is that the form was not relaxed even between women. Instead, Lucas took for truth male commentary on women's capacities and submitted her critiques in the deferential language acceptable to the manners of polite society, whether of Charles Town or London. Novels may have freed women like Lucas only to discover how truly bound they were.

IV: Caroline Clitherall: a Trans-Atlantic link

A final case shows how two generations of women literally embodied the trans-Atlantic link in ideas about femininity and the significance of themes of courtship rituals that figured so prominently in sentimental novels. In the mid-nineteenth century, Carolina Eliza Burgwin Clitherall wrote for her children a four-volume "diary" that was both her autobiography and a biography of her parents' courtship and marriage.⁹⁴ Although her account was surely colored by nineteenth-century ideas of "true womanhood," Clitherall included transcripts of her parents' courtship letters that enable a view of eighteenth-century courtship unrefracted by a nineteenth-century lens. Just as Eliza Carrington felt compelled to write her novel and keep her letters to warn the succeeding generation of the dangers of courtship, so Clitherall wrote her recollections of her parents' courtship to serve as a shining example for her grandchildren of the rewards of virtuous love.

Eliza Bush was a young English Quaker when North Carolina planter/lawyer John Burgwin met her during a stay in England in 1777. Burgwin was introduced to the Bush

⁹³ Pinckney, ed., *Letterbook*, 26 fn 37.

⁹⁴ Caroline Eliza Clitherall *Diaries*, 1751-1860. Southern Historical Collection. Series 3 in this collection is a typescript of the diaries. The first volume is her autobiography; the second is her biography of her parents. All references are to the typescript volumes. Clitherall [1784-1863] wrote these in 1848. *Diaries*, vol. 2, p. 29.

family through a mutual friend and after a single evening's visit, it was clear that Eliza "who had shared the most of his attention" was equally smitten with his "colloquial powers, his general information, & fund of anecdote."⁹⁵ Thereafter Burgwin was a frequent visitor to Ashley, the Bush family home. Easing the course of love between this Quaker woman and Anglican gentleman was the example, within the Bush family itself, of a successful union of "opposite denominations." Eliza Bush's Quaker aunt had married "staunch Churchman" Henry King. Although such religious mixed marriages were rare in eighteenth-century England, "where opposite denominations rarely hold more than ordinary intercourse," King and his wife "respect[ed] the opinions of the other, differing in points of faith, but in Xtian practice united." Pursuing his suit, Burgwin "became soon domesticated with both [families]."⁹⁶

Days passed happily, overshadowed only by the prospect of Burgwin's imminent return to North Carolina, where his property, accumulated over a thirty-year residence, was in danger of being confiscated or destroyed as the Revolution headed into the Southern states. By the time of his departure, however, it was clear that a "barter of hearts" had taken place in spite of the threats to happiness posed by the war between Britain and America. As he sought lodgings in Plymouth until he could safely leave, Burgwin lamented the "unhappy situation of American affairs, [that] checks the inclination of my heart, & blasts every future prospect." Although he acknowledged his

⁹⁵ Clitherall Diaries, vol. 2, 16.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 17, 18. Quakers were not to marry "outsiders" under pain of excommunication from their communities. The marriage of the Kings no doubt was unusual in England; but their felicity may well have been a result of Mrs. King's deference to her husband's wishes: both their sons were raised also as "staunch churchmen."

hopes “destroy’d,” he allowed himself to daydream about the prospect of Eliza joining him. His small rented house that resembled his “Hermitage” in North Carolina wanted only the “assistance of an Eve, [that it] might be made an earthly paradise.” Having dropped that lingering hint, he roused himself, “But why trouble Eliza with my nonsense? Is it because I feel myself pleas’d by . . . making her acquainted with my concerns?”⁹⁷

Burgwin had reason to fear. He was a widower considerably older than Eliza Bush; his Carolina estates were threatened with confiscation; and his suit was complicated by the events of the war. He was unable to ask her to leave the safety and loving circle of her family; neither was he able to part without some pledge of her constancy. He was hardly able to contain his torment in his letter of 27 April 1778. “I have long My Eliza considered Myself as thine,” he began, “nothing retards our union being confirm’d by the most sacred and formal ceremony but the distressing circumstances of the present times.” But in the next breath he cried, “how can I leave thee?” The real worry he left unspoken: how could he hope that she would wait for him? He fretted about the dangers of trans-Atlantic travel, especially when he was “liable to every risque of War, to a thousand inconveniences & dangers.” In the meantime, however, he wished that she would “suffer no uneasy thoughts” on his account and sent her a portrait of himself and a miniature for a bracelet so that she would not forget him.⁹⁸ Did he hope that, with his image perpetually before her, she would realize the depth of her love in her anxiety for his safety upon the seas?

Days later, Burgwin wrote again, his heart and mind still wrestling. His property

⁹⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

in North Carolina could only be saved by his presence; indeed, if he did nothing, “I shou’d not only lose my own self-respect, but be justly condemn’d by all thinking Persons.” “What then my dearest Friend am I to do?” he continued, “Marry and be immediately separated from Thee? No, beloved Eliza. – This cannot, this must not be.” The other alternative, to take her to America, was equally untenable; her female delicacy would not permit it. He foresaw “difficulties alas, too, too great for the tenderness & delicacy of my friend to encounter.” Just the thought was unbearable for him. “To paint them in my mind as they strike me, wou’d be too affecting- the very idea is anguish,” he said, dismissing that option.⁹⁹

For her part, Eliza Bush brooked no doubts of her constancy. “Altho’ the Seas divide us,” she continued to be grateful for his friendship and spent “many a melancholy hour . . . by the perusal of your letters to me.” She felt “rather an awkwardness” in writing to him; with all the uncertainties of wartime, they had set a time limit for their understanding. “The terms propos’d and fixed to a certain month – which now has past” contributed to her confusion; she was “tenderly embarrass[ed] how to act.” Her circumspection did not prevent a strong statement of her commitment to him, even as she allowed that his feelings might have changed. “It requires not a moment’s consideration with me. – I am unalterable, but yet, I wou’d by no means wish then to act in the least inconsistent with his own sentiments of Prudence.”¹⁰⁰

With the course of her love dependent upon the course of the war, Bush followed the news with interest. Prefacing her comments with the hope that “the little tattle of a

⁹⁹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁰⁰ Letter, Eliza Bush to John Burgwin, undated, *ibid.*, 32,33.

female pen may amuse a lonely hour," she reported any rumors of peace; that the Americans were sufficiently discouraged to "reconsider . . . the terms of -73;" and that "delegates are appointed by some of the Provinces to negotiate with Grt Britn. Holland to be the place of Treaty." Since the cause of peace would also advance their cause of love, the Quaker Bush teased her North Carolinian suitor, "You us'd to laugh at My Politics, but I am flatter'd by my wish to believe my intelligence good, if it should please Infinite Wisdom . . .to restore Peace on Earth."¹⁰¹

In spite of her hint that her political savvy was superior to his, Bush remained deferential to Burgwin in the matter of their courtship. "Painful has been, and still are my feelings on this subject," she wrote, yet still she would "commit this to your guidance. I know well the delicacy of your heart, and submit it entirely to your decision." In the meantime, she would live a quiet, retired life in her country home of Ashley. But if the "Prospect of Peace be realis'd probably you may be tempted to once more ask your friends in England how they are & if so," she added pointedly, "I think I have a right to expect you to devote some time to us." To allay his fears that she would forget him in the midst of the social whirl of London, she mischievously signed herself the "Hermitess."¹⁰²

Burgwin returned to England and rented for a year a house opportunely situated in Thornbury, within a mile of Ashley and "Church or Meeting." Successfully conducting his suit, Burgwin married Eliza Bush in Thornbury's Anglican Church in February 1782. After the ceremony, Eliza's Quaker mother and aunt met the bridal couple at Burgwin's home, where Eliza met her mother's embrace with the promise, "I am a Quaker in

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 33, 36.

Principle, dearest Mother, your Child will never forget, or disgrace the religion you have so early instill'd into her heart."¹⁰³

Clitherall's narrative took up where the letters left off. A son John was born in 1783. In 1784 Burgwin and his pregnant wife left England for North Carolina; Eliza Carolina Burgwin (Clitherall) was born on 9 April 1784, the day they landed at Charleston, South Carolina. Having survived the hazards of an ocean crossing, Eliza Burgwin found that life at her husband's "Hermitage" was not without its anxieties. Burgwin still had "many vexations and troublesome affairs to settle connected personally and politically with the late war." His wife, delicate though he may have thought her, "shar'd his difficulties to a greater extent than he had any idea of whilst Prudence, conceal'd these feelings." These burdens, combined with a third pregnancy, "undermined the health which had ever been feeble since her residence in Carolina." In October 1787, six weeks after the birth of a third child, Eliza Burgwin died in spite of her husband's desperate efforts to transport her to Wilmington for help.¹⁰⁴

Her daughter's tribute could have been written on either side of the Atlantic. "The English Stranger was beloved by all classes in Society," Caroline Clitherall wrote of her mother. "The innate refinement of her mind, her loving heart, her winning address, her humane treatment of her servants & above all her consistent deportment as a Xtian," all met in the person of Eliza Burgwin, who encompassed all the best virtues endowed woman by God and nature.

Caroline Clitherall was but three years old when her mother died; she could not possibly

¹⁰³ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰⁴ Clitherall Diaries, vol. 2, p. 5.

have thought of her mother in those terms, much less have had such recollections of her. Instead, Clitherall's "reminiscences" were colored, indeed formed by, mid-nineteenth-century ideals of true womanhood.¹⁰⁵ The letters the young Eliza had written to her suitor were "the index of a heart which knew no double covering," and the best source for her daughter Caroline's essay. Read as intensively as any advice literature, the mother's letters gave her daughter a view of courtship that could be read against popular novels: a view that relied on trust in Providence while maintaining the highest standards of virtue. How often had her father assured her mother during the course of a wartime separation with no foreseeable end to "fear not then . . . whilst we . . . are treading the Path of Virtue"? Even as he dashed her hopes about a faltering American will to fight, he urged her to be "resign'd to [God's] will, and rest upon his arm for support. . . mercy and goodness."¹⁰⁶ Their faith in a God who directed the course of their lives, and their standards of virtue and generosity that could not bear to bind the other in an indefinite promise, gave Clitherall an example to set against the naïve, yet faithless, women of popular novels who lost everything to a seducer's empty promise. Indeed, the letters of Eliza and John Burgwin may have saved their young Caroline from just such a fate. Three weeks after her mother's death, Caroline was taken to England to join her older brother, and raised in the same family circle that had so lovingly embraced and then relinquished her mother. Here she was educated, and here she fell in love for the first time. He was a soldier in the British army, the brother of a friend. "Love, first love," she

¹⁰⁵ See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18 (1966) 151-174 and Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

¹⁰⁶ Clitherall Diaries, vol. 2, 26, 29.

wrote in an echo of fictional sentimentality, “no matter what may be future circumstances, never can be driven from a warm and feeling heart.” Her friends disapproved of the match, however, and citing “almost insurmountable obstacles,” Caroline made no promise to him. Instead, obedient to a pledge she had made to her father, she returned to North Carolina, leaving behind England and her suitor.¹⁰⁷

At the Hermitage, time “pass’d in dreary solitude” for Caroline, relieved only by Sunday visitors. In the sanctuary of her little study, she spent hours revisiting her English family and friends in her imagination. It was the “lonely, dreary, useless life I led at the H[ermitage],” she later admitted, that allowed the cautious overtures of a North Carolina gentleman to interest her at all.¹⁰⁸ George Clitherall was “unlike in mind or manner to the few Gentleman I met,” Caroline observed, “the frequency of his visits, the approbation of them by my Father, all conspir’d to render them so pleasing.”¹⁰⁹ With the memory of her passion and close call with her British admirer fresh in her mind, she judged that this slow wooing was indeed love. “As true love is timid,” she reasoned, “so were his approaches to a declaration.”¹¹⁰ Novels taught the perils of trusting passions and instinct; better to rely on reason, the approbation of an experienced father, and, in Caroline’s word, “destiny.”

Caroline often used the words ‘destiny’ and ‘fate’ in her accounts of her parents’ lives

¹⁰⁷ Clitherall’s Diaries do not date her first romance, her return to America, or the following courtship. She was born in 1784; it is probably safe to estimate that these events occurred between 1800 and 1805.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 3.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

and her own. For her, however, those words were actually a code for a higher power of divinity that directed the course of everyone's lives.¹¹¹ The best things come to those who have faith and wait, she learned. It was a lesson clearly visible in the letters of her parents in the uncertain days of their courtship and deeply impressed upon their daughter. "There is a (destiny) which governs the affairs of men, & shaped their ends, rough hew them as they will," she wrote, quoting William Shakespeare. Caroline firmly believed this. The day before Clitherall approached Caroline's father for permission to court her, a letter arrived from England. As if to close the door forever on youthful romance, an English cousin informed her that her soldier "had been order'd to join his reg[imen]t. The fire of war had again broken out in India & ere [Caroline] rec[eive]d that letter he wou'd be on the vast deep." The news reminded Caroline again of the "sincere affection" she had felt for him, although she consoled herself with the thought of her honorable behavior in the matter. "Of a Union with him I had long ceas'd to think possible," she realized, "and had never suffer'd him to expect."¹¹² When her father asked her, with a "cute look . . . if [her] heart was in Eng[lan]d," she replied, "on the Ocean."¹¹³ She assured him that there had been no exchange of promises. "As I might expect," she recalled, "my Father said 'twas all romance, & he was very glad I had made no engagement, so absurd, & so hopeless.' " Heavy-hearted, Caroline too "felt this truth –

¹¹¹ That she spoke of this often is indicated by her comment that, "I have been ridicul'd, perhaps censur'd, for My Napoleon creed of destiny." But she explained that she knew " 'There is a Power above' who overruleth all mortal plans – and with out whose will even the little sparrow falleth not." Ibid., p.16.

¹¹² Ibid., 3.

¹¹³ Ibid., 5.

but first love, was not so easily shaken, or dismiss'd."¹¹⁴

She turned her attentions to George Clitherall's plodding suit, accepting the invitations he and his mother issued, and finally agreeing to an engagement. From his frequent visits to the Hermitage, Clitherall had become "as one of the family . . . & was daily growing in [her] affections." Noting his "great respect and love" for his mother, "his religious observance," and his attendance at Sunday services "without weariness or indifference," Caroline sagely persuaded herself that she had chosen wisely and well.¹¹⁵ It would take a dramatic down-turn of events to engage her heart, however.

One day, in a scene of high drama, her father returned from a trip to Wilmington in a fury. "Where is C[lithera]ll?," he thundered at his daughter who had run to greet him, "drive him off – See him no more – he shall no longer be in my house—he is a deceiver—" Imitative of many fictional heroines, Caroline "felt like fainting." Summoned to her father's study, Caroline was bidden to read an anonymous letter "with the most gross, & cruel accusations of Mr. C." Clitherall robustly denied the charges, pointing to the letter's anonymity as "a proof of their falsity," and invited the "most minute investigation" of his character. Nothing moved, Burgwin "refus'd to do so, & disannul'd our engagement forever."¹¹⁶

The scene left Caroline's mind in a whirl. Reviewing the whole, she enumerated the elements of the drama: "the humiliating and cruel position in which he was plac'd; the sudden dash from happiness to sorrow; the mysterious agency of the slanderer, . . .

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 7.

[and Clitherall's] hopeless situation." Samuel Richardson himself could not have brought more sensational elements to his novels: the stinging insult to masculine honor, the incalculable plunge in emotions, mystery, and a hero trapped by forces he can neither identify nor fight. The pathos of the Clitherall's plight brought to Caroline's heart "a rush of love, and a promise that I wou'd receive no other to my heart."¹¹⁷ It was the last element to make the story complete: a heroine, who though stricken by an unforeseen revelation, realizes the truth of her passions and fervidly pledges herself to her wronged suitor. "There appear'd a destiny connected with my preferences," she cried, railing against cruel fate, "a kind of perversity, a fatal opposition."¹¹⁸

Eventually the truth won out, but it had been neither fate nor a divine power that had orchestrated the drama. John Burgwin had not only known who sent the letter (and "had no great opinion of him," according to Caroline), but had destroyed the signature. Remaining stubborn even in the face of discovery however, he would not "retract the angry expressions, & refusal he made to Mr. C." One of his friends explained to Caroline that it seemed that the "chief point of my Father's objection (shou'd the slander be remov'd) was the difference of fortune."¹¹⁹ Burgwin grudgingly gave his consent shortly thereafter and the two wed.

In some ways, Caroline Clitherall's virtuous courtship stood in marked contrast with those of contemporary novels. Resisting the strength of passion with her first suitor, responding to the wisdom of true friends, and obedient to the call of a parent, she was

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

unlike the young women who heedlessly left family and friends to rely upon a dashing (usually uniformed) suitor's promise of love. While acknowledging that the blandness of her life may have made her more receptive of the overtures of an uninspired suitor, Caroline worked hard at persuading herself to accept a sensible man. It was not a particularly satisfying solution, but it was respectable.

Caroline Burgwin Clitherall's story differed from that of novels in another significant respect. Unlike novels, where secrets and deceit drive the main characters, Caroline's hero depends upon the exposure of truth. Indeed, full disclosure was critical to each of the main characters in her story. The only way George Clitherall knew to clear himself was a vigorous investigation, in which he invited Burgwin to write to all who knew him for character references, making of his life an open, unabridged book. Similarly, Caroline had opened herself to Clitherall in the early days of their courtship. Resolving that she "wou'd not consent to receive him as a Suitor until he knew the whole," she showed him all the letters she had received from her British suitor.¹²⁰

Such standards of virtue were strikingly different from the plots of novels that depended upon secret alliances and messages, forbidden meetings, and shadowy pasts. That the heightened romantic expectations produced by novels affected Caroline Burgwin, however, is also clear. Like every child who thinks their parent impervious to (or forgetful of) passion, she expected her father to dismiss the "romance" of her love for her British soldier. She may have been forced to relinquish her soldier, but she did not have to abjure her "sincere affection" for him. She carried his letters, the cherished talismans of their love, across the Atlantic and kept them long after she had given up

¹²⁰ Ibid., 6

hope of their union. It is not hard to imagine her pouring over them, on a dull day at the Hermitage, indulging the bittersweetness of a lost love. Ill-fated love was as powerful a theme of romance in the eighteenth century as it remains today. For Caroline, her devotion to that affection was as much a test of her female heart as it was a badge of romantic honor.

Before the dramatic interlude that transformed her respectable courtship into the stuff of romance, Caroline spoke of George Clitherall with respectful deference but never with affection. Not until the hand of a mysterious stranger so abruptly ripped him from her life, did she “realize” her feelings. Only then did she become fully engaged, pledging that she would “unite with him in every means to discover from whom came the foul aspersion” that destroyed their hopes of happiness.¹²¹ George Clitherall may have been a sensible choice, but until the stranger’s melodramatic intervention, he never met her romantic expectations nor was he a replacement for Caroline’s first love.

Reconsiderations

These short studies each have something to say about the way eighteenth-century women read their lives into their novels. Eliza Lucas took the characters as real even though unfooled by Richardson’s epistolary form, she realized them to be fiction. Hannah Corbin’s choices of reading supported her faith and the importance of love and the integrity of family life as she coped with those very issues in her own life. Eliza Carrington (Betsey Ambler) found both the form of the novel and the real-life story she witnessed so compelling, she chose to record Rachel Warrington’s story into a novel to ensure it would be read by her nieces. While Carrington learned lessons about how *not* to

¹²¹ Ibid., 7-8.

behave, Caroline Burgwin gleaned from her parents' letters positive lessons about virtuous courtship. While those lessons were strong enough to guide her choices, they did not counteract entirely the influence of novels that made her yearn for the passion of a foregone love.

Novels posed several threats as they gained popularity among a widening literate audience during the course of the eighteenth century. Plots that featured lecherous aristocratic men who preyed on vulnerable women questioned the legitimacy of aristocratic authority in post-Restoration England. The contract theory of government elaborated by John Locke empowered a growing reading public (that included women) to grant or withhold their sanction of the aristocracy's right to rule. Excluded from the vote, disenfranchised men and women made their voices heard through their novels. Novels also upset the patriarchal order with respect to gender roles. The fictions of British writers Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood earlier in the century challenged that order in stories that allowed their heroines sexual freedoms without suffering ruin.¹²² By the latter part of the century, however, novels such as those Hannah Lee Corbin read conformed more to patriarchal ideology. Indeed, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg points out, the principle preoccupation for American novelists may well have been how "independence and individual happiness be made compatible with social order," rather than opposed to it.¹²³

¹²² Catherine Craft-Fairchild, *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century Fictions by Women* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

¹²³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Domesticating 'Virtue': Coquettes and Revolutionaries in Young America," in *Literature and the Body*, Elaine Scarry, ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

Novels, then, significantly influenced literate women's lives: women responded to them; they identified with them; they found fictional characters real enough to embolden their own words. Corbin ordered them from England, even though it was hardly proper for a Baptist woman to do so. Eliza Lucas's reading of *Pamela* proved the very point that critics feared most: the problem of women, with their weaker intellects, being unable to distinguish fiction from fact. Both Carrington and Clitherall took their cues from novels to write their own accounts, one a 'novel' with only a gloss of fiction, the latter a biography in reverential tones, setting down the example of a mother as a model of female perfection. The correspondence between Betsey Ambler and Mildred Smith, the source for Carrington's novel, show how the young girls' refusal to shun their fallen friend anticipated themes that appeared in American novels by the century's end. Susannah Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1797) was as much a plea for mature womanly compassion for fallen innocents as it was a warning to the young and naïve.¹²⁴

Clitherall's autobiography went beyond her memoir of her mother. Incorporating her own decision to place duty and reason over passion as she left her British soldier behind, she then told a story of even more drama in which honor and virtue contributed toward a happy ending. In a straightforward narrative directed to her grandchildren, Clitherall wrote a history of honorable conduct that was a direct response to fictional heroines who realized too late the error of their choices – and how much better the result!

Eighteenth-century novels took various forms. "History," such as *A History of a Young Lady of Distinction*, was one way to render a fictional story real. Another, the

¹²⁴ In one appeal to older, wiser (and safely married) women, Rowson wrote, "My dear Madam, contract not your brow into a frown of disapprobation. I mean not to extenuate the faults of those unhappy women who fall victims to guilt and folly; but surely, when

epistolary form in novels such as *Pamela*, was a compelling literary device that drew the reader into the plot as it unfolded. Clitherall showed another reason why that form was so effective. As she transcribed her parents' words, she imagined how they must have received the missives of the other: "How often were these lines read – how treasur'd – how waited for by hopes and fear."¹²⁵ The letters drew her into the uncertainties of their wartime world, as "copy[ing] the sentiments of [her] Father," she wondered, "have all their hopes met fruition? Have all their fears past away? Have they been join'd together as one?—was the wide ocean cross'd, & the stranger land their home?"¹²⁶ Clitherall read the letters in as much suspense as any reader anxious for the preservation of Pamela's virtue. It was only suitable that she should choose that form to convey the power of *her* story to her descendants.

.....
 we reflect how many errors we are ourselves subject to . . . we surely may pity the faults of others." Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 67-68.

¹²⁵ Clitherall Diaries, vol. 2, 28-29.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

CHAPTER VI

REFASHIONING FEMININITY

“And why should girls be learnd or wise[?]” John Trumbull’s verse queried, “Books only serve to spoil their eyes.”¹ Of course, education was uneven in the colonial period for both boys and girls, but Trumbull’s assessment (almost universally shared) of the utility of educating girls explains why it was worse for girls. With such meager intellectual fare, advice literature loomed even larger in importance in a girl’s education, for not only did it comprise the bulk of what girls read, it also aimed to refine their understanding of the female nature. Assessing the literature that was at the core of women’s learning, however, only begins to address our understanding of eighteenth-century ideas of being female. To complete the picture, an examination of how women responded to the literature is necessary. The scarcity of southern women’s writings relative to men’s before the end of the century demonstrates the results of the imbalance in educational opportunity; it also challenges historians to gauge the influence of the dominant ideas about gender on women themselves. Absent the luxury of written analyses of the literature itself, attention must turn to different indicators, such as how women approached the subjects of the conduct literature: dancing, courtship and marriage, female education, and deference to men. This chapter will show the influence

¹ John Trumbull, “The Progress of Dulness,” quoted in Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), 185.

of the advice that circulated in the Anglo-American world of the eighteenth century, and how women in the South created new models of womanhood within a patriarchal society buttressed by slavery.

John Trumbull's verse summed up prevailing eighteenth-century thinking about the usefulness of educating girls. Since they would not have the responsibility of supporting a family, it was thought, girls simply did not need the education boys did. It was not until 1771 that Massachusetts poor laws even considered writing to be a minimal educational necessity for a girl.² Gender was more of a bar to education than was economic status: Samuel Sanford, for example, of Accomack County, Virginia bequeathed £200 for the education of "six poor male Children Boyes whose parentage are Esteemed incapable of Giving them Learning."³ Even in New England, where belief in the necessity of reading Scripture propelled the highest literacy rate in the colonies for men and women, Abigail Adams complained to her husband in 1778, "You need not be told how much female Education is neglected, nor how fashionable it has been to ridicule Female learning."⁴ In the South, formal education was a haphazard affair for all but gentry sons who were sent to England for their schooling. Even wealthy planter Robert Carter of Nomini Hall, who built a schoolhouse on the grounds of his plantation, was

² This is significant, E. Jennifer Monaghan pointed out, since the point of apprenticeship was to produce economically self-sufficient adults; the general expectation was that girls would marry and be cared for. E. Jennifer Monaghan, "Literacy Instruction and Gender in Colonial New England," in Cathy Davidson, ed., *Reading in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 63.

³ Will, Samuel Sandford, 27 March 1710. Arrington Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

⁴ Abigail Adams to John Adams, 30 June 1778, *Adams Family Correspondence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) vol. 3, 52.

unable to provide consistency in his children's instructors, hiring a succession of three tutors in three years.⁵

Private tutors, in-town classrooms, and makeshift field schools provided a range of schooling for more fortunate southern girls. Most young women, however, acquired their education in the unconventional "classrooms" of their houses and plantations. Here they learned housekeeping and medicinal, sewing, and other skills that equipped them for their futures as matrons in their own homes. Here too young women learned their catechism and devotions, how to behave in socially acceptable ways, and how to attract and keep a husband.⁶ Preparing in these ways to become wives and mothers, girls gained an education for identity, rather than an education for vocation that their brothers would receive. Lacking formal programs for education, literate young women had little to read beyond the varieties of conduct-of-life literature that their elders considered suitable for their consumption. This advice became the core curriculum for their learning of what it meant to be female.

⁵ Hunter Dickinson Farish, ed. *Journal & Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993). James Marshall was Fithian's predecessor; John Peck, Fithian's friend and Princeton classmate, succeeded him. 247-48, n. 159; 240, n. 6.

⁶ On education in early America, see Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education, The Colonial Experience* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970); Sol Cohen, ed., *Education in the United States: A Documentary History* Vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1974). On women's education in America, see Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980), 185-232 and Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women 1750-1800* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1980), 256-294. For women's education in the colonial south, see Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938; reprint., W. W. Norton & Company, 1972), 185-207.

In the colonial south the absence of formal education for young women was even more acute; the lag in women's literacy rates in the South bears this out. Women's literacy in Virginia rose from below twenty percent in the early seventeenth century to only fifty percent by 1850.⁷ So too does the dearth of southern women's writings before the end of the eighteenth century. The role of advice literature in such a setting assumed greater importance, then, because it was the canon, the whole of what a young girl needed to know. Virginians may not have owned many books, but the two they most commonly owned, the Bible and Richard Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man*, reinforced teachings about proper male and female relationships, particularly female subordination to men. The essential distinctions between male and female articulated in the advice literature, such as the male capacity for reason as opposed to the female capacity for feeling, fell upon fertile ground in the slave society of the colonial South.

Not all women accepted such distinctions, however. English feminists of the late seventeenth century, recognizing how both science and Christian tradition had combined forces to prove women's inferior capacity to reason, had fought for access to the same kind of educational opportunities men enjoyed. It was this deprivation, rather than their inherent nature, they argued, that explained their inferior capacities. The nascent feminism of these early writers, dubbed "Reason's disciples" by Hilda Smith, died almost

⁷ Kenneth Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Enquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974), 72-72, 97 ; David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 124; David A. Rawson, " 'Guardians of their own Liberty': A Contextual History of Print Culture in Virginia Society" (Ph.D. diss, College of William and Mary, 1998), 49. Male Literacy rates in New England in 1750 were approximately 75 per cent and by the 1790s had risen to above 90 per cent; in Virginia, male literacy reached approximately 67 per cent and remained there to the end of the century. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England*, 74-78.

as soon as it had been born, submitting over the course of the eighteenth century to a view of women as feeling, rather than reasoning, creatures.⁸ These women writers, however, had produced a substantial body of work addressed to questions of women's intellect and education. It was no accident that writers such as Allestree, Halifax, and Fordyce were popular in the colonial South while the writings of these late seventeenth-century English women writers were almost completely absent.⁹

One hundred years later, women in Virginia would struggle with the same questions their English ancestors had, but in an entirely different setting. English women faced stalwart resistance to their efforts for education, publication, and political participation; yet they wrote, published and participated in a developing salon culture and the rapid urbanization of Britain allowed them to expand the boundaries of female respectability.¹⁰ Virginia women had no such context as they tried sort out the same

⁸ Hilda Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Angeline Goreau, *The Whole Duty of Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Garden City, N.Y.: Dial Press, 1985).

⁹ Julia Cherry Spruill, "Southern Lady's Library, 1700-1776," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 34 (1935), 23-41; "Books in Williamsburg," *William and Mary Quarterly* 15 (1906), 100-113; Library of Robert Carter of Nomini Hall, listed in Farish, ed. *Fithian's Diary*, 221-229; Edwin Wolf, 2nd, "The Dispersal of the Library of William Byrd of Westover," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 68 (1958), 19-106; Edwin Wolf, 2nd, "More Books from the Library of the Byrds of Westover," in *ibid.*, 88 (1978), 51-82. Nor have any works of this nature appeared in any private inventories in the present study.

¹⁰ Ignored until recently, English women writers before Jane Austen have generated a great deal of scholarly interest. For an introduction to the subject see Dale Spender, ed., *Living By the Pen: Early British Women Writers* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992); James Fitzmaurice and Josephine A. Roberts, eds., *Major Women Writers of Seventeenth-Century England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992). On the expanding boundaries of

contradictions that English women had attempted to do a century earlier. Largely unfamiliar with Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest* (1694) or Bathusa Makin's *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen in Religion, Manners, Arts and Tongues* (1673), they struggled to reconcile the lessons of the literature with those of their experience.¹¹ The significance of southern women's writings by the latter half of the eighteenth century, therefore, must be understood in this context. Surrounded on all sides and in every way (legally, economically, physically) by a form of patriarchy that depended for its survival upon keeping the distinctions between male and female, black and white, uniformly rigid; and unaware of the ways in which English women had attempted to deal with these questions one hundred years earlier, southern women had to invent for themselves a new notion of femininity in a setting far more restrictive than existed in Britain.¹²

female respectability, see Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Margaret R. Hunt argues that the boundaries between public and private were considerably blurred for the middle class as commerce permeated the home. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

¹¹ Astell's *Serious Proposal* was first published in London in 1694; Makin's *Essay* was published in London in 1673.

¹² For the intersections of race and gender, see Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996); Catherine Clinton and Michele Gillespie, *Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Edmund Morgan shows the intersection of race and power in *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975); Rhys Isaac analyzes male gentry rituals emphasizing rank in *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982). For works on the gendering of racial difference in the nineteenth century see Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1982); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Suzanne

The important question of the influence of the advice literature upon women remains, however, as we have learned the pitfalls of reading a society strictly through its prescriptive literature. Whereas Chapter Five treated the written responses of southern women to novels, this chapter will read women's behavior to examine the ways women read, and made their own, the lessons of the advice literature.¹³ In other words, given the limitations of examining the process of how women internalized the lessons of the advice literature, we turn now to an examination of the results: the behaviors which suggest a refashioning of ideas of femininity.

But how did they join the lessons of experience to what the literature taught? Enough evidence exists to show a degree of noncompliance with prevailing authorities, but did that signify a complete rejection of them? Eliza Lucas, for example, educated in England and running a six-hundred acre plantation in her father's absence, criticized Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, but then questioned her own intellectual adequacy to the task of literary criticism, particularly of a male author's work. And how do we judge

Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985). For ways in which male economic power in Virginia was strengthened by inheritance practices, see Holly Brewer, "Entailing Aristocracy in Colonial Virginia: 'Ancient Feudal Restraints' and Revolutionary Reform," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d Ser., 54 (April 1997), 307-46. For women and the law of property in early America, see Mary Lynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1986).

¹³ Historians are deeply indebted to anthropologists for learning how to examine behavior for clues to the mentalite of the subject. Rhys Isaac explained how his used this technique to study gentry culture in eighteenth-century Virginia in Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*. For other stellar examples by historians of early modern Europe, see Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (originally published Giulio Einaudi Editore 1976; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1980) and Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983). This chapter observes women's behavior, that is, the way they presented themselves to their society, their men, and each

female conformity to male standards of behavior? To what extent was women's conformity manipulative posturing, to what degree internalized belief? Did Lucas really believe her intellectual powers subordinate to a man's? The fact that her self-deprecatory remarks appeared in a letter to a female friend suggests that she did, even as she continued to criticize Richardson's characterization of *Pamela*. Lacking the literary commentary that would become a staple of nineteenth-century female academies' curricula, how do we account for the selectivity of eighteenth-century women's adherence to the canon of advice they read? None of these women would label herself a non-conformist; all were concerned deeply with their reputations and respectability. How was it, then, that southern women not only ignored prohibitions against reading novels, but found the authority to refashion what they read into a new model of respectable, Christian, southern femininity?

In their behavior it is possible to "read" changing ideas about the meaning of gender in the eighteenth-century South. This chapter examines a series of behaviors: women's public deportment and their defensiveness against accusations of female vices, courtship, marriage, and the development of female kin and friendship networks, to describe a new construction of femininity by the end of the century.

Female Deportment

Female "inaneities" frequently had been the subject of censure in traditional advice literature. Anglican priest Devereux Jarratt abhorred Virginians' passion for balls, declaring that "nothing tends more to alienate the heart from God, and erase all impressions of religion, and sentiments of vital piety from the mind, than dancings and

other and their deviations from expected behavior to assess how they received conventional advice.

frolickings.”¹⁴ Innocent though the dance might appear to be, he believed such preferences belied an ignorance of the very needs of the soul.¹⁵ In this respect, James Fordyce wrote rather more moderately, perhaps from fear of alienating his elite audience. Aware that dancing was an “elegant accomplishment,” he believed there need “be no impropriety in it.”¹⁶

But there were dangers to such activities. Perpetually preoccupied with appearances and reputation, Fordyce urged women to be ever mindful of their deportment at such occasions. The chief danger he saw was a lady’s overexposure in society. “Ranging at large the wide common of the world,” rather than staying safely within her domestic circle, made a woman an easy target for the “destroyers” who would “see her as lawful game, to be hunted down without hesitation.” And if the quarry is bagged, he shrugged helplessly, “what will it avail the poor wanderer, to plead that she meant only a little harmless amusement?”¹⁷

Yet Virginia women were as devoted to the dance as their men.¹⁸ Perhaps they had read *The Young Gentleman’s and Lady’s Private Tutor* which touted dancing as “an

¹⁴ Devereux Jarratt, *Sermons on Various and Important Subjects in Practical Divinity, adapted to the meanest capacities and suited to the Family and Closet*, 3 Vols., (Philadelphia: William Woodward, 1794), Vol. 2, 237, Sermon XVIII.

¹⁵ See Chapter 3 for Jarratt’s views on women’s vanities and dancing.

¹⁶ James Fordyce, *Sermons for Young Women*. Early American Imprints. 2nd Series, No. 1752, vol. 1, 119.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁸ See Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian*. In an often-cited incident, Councillor Robert Carter had his son Bob “flogg’d severely for failing to give a host adequate notice that he would not attend a dance. Bob went “instantly to the Dance,” 156. Rhys Isaac has discussed the central place the dance occupied in colonial Virginia society in *Transformation of Virginia*.

universal Good, [that] adds greatly to the happiness of Society, for the happiness of Society depends on Civility.” Rebutting the criticism that “dancing infringes on Religion,” the *Private Tutor* cited the psalmist’s words, “Praise him in the Cymbals and Dances” as proof that dancing was “acceptable to God.”¹⁹ In any event, “Virginians are of genuine Blood—They will dance or die!” New Jersey tutor Philip Vickers Fithian observed during his year sojourn in Virginia’s Northern Neck. He described whole days devoted to dancing, as in one instance, a large group retired to the dancing room immediately following breakfast, “continued til two, we dined at half after three—soon after Dinner we repaired to the Dancing-Room again.” He was effusive in his praise of the young people’s “great ease and propriety” as they moved to the music “with perfect regularity.” On another occasion, from a corner of the ballroom, Fithian watched “the Ladies [who] were Dressed Gay, and splendid, & when dancing, their Silks & Brocades rustled and trailed behind them!”²⁰

Not only did Virginia women fail to take notice of dancing’s moral perils; they delighted in dance. Writing from Williamsburg in 1768, Anne Blair described the local social scene for her married sister, Mary Braxton. “Balls both by Land and by Water in abundance,” Blair reported, “the Gentlemen of the Rippon [an English ship] are I think the most agreeable, affable sor[t] I have every met with, and really it is charming to go on Board; the Drum & Fife, pleasing countenances, such polite, yet easy behavior all

¹⁹ M. Towle, *The Young Gentleman’s and Lady’s Private Tutor* (Oxford, 1770), 180–81.

²⁰ Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian*, 33, 57.

bespeak a hearty welcome.”²¹ A man who could dance well was invariably pleasing to the ladies as Samuel Smith discovered during a stay in Baltimore in 1787. “We are all Alive to Amusement --& that I have got such Credit Lately for my most excellent Dancing that I am Courted as a Partner by the Celebrated Miss Chase & others,” he reported to Wilson Nicholas back in Virginia.²²

Courtship

Of course, balls were the stage on which many courtship theatrics were acted out. Anne Blair was flattered by the many attentions showered upon her. “To be people of consequence is vastly Clever,” she told her sister, thoroughly enjoying an occurrence so rare for a young woman. Fifteen-year-old Betsey Ambler also had been “transported with delight at being considered a distinguished personage” at a ball given in her honor in Williamsburg in 1780, her “heart fluttering” from the attentions she received there.²³ It was all part of the posturing of courtship ritual, but fun nonetheless. “How stand’s yr. Heart Girls I hear you ask?,” Blair continued to her sister, “mine seem’s to be roving amidst Dear Variety.” So content was she that “Nothing my Dr Sisr. (a husband excepted) could give a more additional satisfaction to the Happiness we now enjoy than yr. Good Company.”²⁴

²¹ Anne Blair to Mrs. Mary Braxton, 1768. Blair, Banister, Braxton, Horner, and Whiting Papers, 1765-1890. Special Collections, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

²² Samuel Smith (Baltimore) to Wilson C. Nicholas (Albemarle County, Virginia), 1 June 1787. Carter Smith Papers, 1726-1870, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

²³ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, 1780, Letter No. 2, Ambler Family Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

²⁴ Anne Blair to Mrs. Mary Braxton, 1768. Blair, Banister Papers.

Courtship, rather than being a moral minefield for young Virginia women, appeared to be rather lighthearted in Anne Blair's correspondence. She could not mask the mischievous delight she took in observing other courting couples. She wrote to Richard Randolph of "Madam's" receipt of a love letter proposing marriage. "Dicky, Dicky, what wou'd I not have given to had your smeller's come poking at the Door, in the same moment that she recd. Mr. L. Tunstall's declaration's of Love?, " Blair wrote mischievously, "she was in a little Pett. . . a glowing Blush suffused oer her Face attended with a trembling." The letter fell from the lady's hands; full of the curiosity "natural to all our Sex," Blair caught it. "[I] must own on a perusal," she admitted in spite of herself, "[I] was charm'd with the Elegance of his stile." True to the conventions of modesty of the advice literature, the recipient "thought it proper to return his Letter back again, with just a line or two signifying the disagreeableness of the subject &c." This she apparently did, although not without Anne "coax[ing] her out of a Copy first." Anne could not wait to show the letter to "Dicky," anticipating the "opportunity of observing [his] Physiogomy" when she did.²⁵

The lady had other admirers as well, Anne Blair told Dick Randolph. Sunday services at Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg doubled as social events in which local swains vied for her attention. "There is severall other's Dancing . . . about here," Anne crowed mischievously, "nay they scrape all the Skin off their Shin's stepping over the Benches at the Church, in endeavouring who shou'd be first to Hand her in the Chariot."²⁶ While their elders strolled about churchyards all over Virginia discussing

²⁵ Anne Blair to Dicky (probably Richard Randolph), 14 June 1769. Blair, Banister Papers, College of William and Mary.

²⁶ Ibid.

tobacco prices, quarterhorses, and dinner plans for the day, young men and women conducted their own social affairs.²⁷

Barbeques were also enormously popular courting sites. Here young men and women could mingle freely, spared the necessity of searching (or waiting) for a partner as at a ball. That they were held frequently and attended regularly is apparent in a letter Samuel Peachey wrote in 1773 to his friend William Latane of Essex County. "We have Barbiques every fortnight," he said.²⁸ These sites allowed courting men and women some freedom to get to know one another, although under some supervision. Balls, barbeques, even Sunday church gatherings brought young people together in settings that allowed them to mingle without ever straying from watchful parental eyes. Though far from foolproof, as the seduction of Rachel Warrington made clear, social functions within the domain of a father's plantation or the church provided safe places for young people to meet. South Carolinian Ralph Izard, Jr. observed at the turn of the century that "In Virginia once a fortnight they have what they call a fish feast or Barbicue at which all the Gentry within 20 miles round are present with all their families. I was very much suprized to see the Ladies both young & old so fond of drinking Toddy before dinner."²⁹

²⁷ Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 58-87; Farish, ed., *Fithian*, 137. William Byrd II and Landon Carter, two gentry keepers of diaries in the eighteenth century also recorded the social aspects of Sunday gatherings to worship. See for example, Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1941), 73 and Jack P. Greene, ed., *the Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778* (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1987), 743-44.

²⁸ Samuel Peachey to William Latane, 9 September 1773. Latane Family Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

²⁹ Ralph Izard, Jr. to Alice Izard (Mrs. Ralph, Sr.), 28 May 1801. Ralph Izard, Sr. Papers, Library of Congress.

These public settings facilitated gently blossoming romances: men scraping their shins on church benches in their haste to be of assistance to a lady; men and women seeking advice from friends before the first tentative approaches; women graciously accepting or tactfully refusing the advances. Indeed, lovers sought more eagerly the counsel and approval of friends than of parents. Samuel Peachey was “almost determined” not to attend any more barbeques until he sought the advice of his friend, William Latane. “A certain Lady of our acquaintance attends them, & I am afraid that being too often in her comp[an]y may kindle the old flame,” Peachey confessed to his friend, “indeed I think I percieve it growing already & if I should lett it get any hotter will be a hard task for me to risque my self.” Unsure of how to proceed, Peachey asked Latane, “what had I best do in such a case, keep altogether from seeing her or try my fortune at once[?]”³⁰

This was not the first time Peachey and Latane had discussed affairs of the heart. An exchange of three letters over nine months in 1772 was most concerned about the wedding of their acquaintance, Miss Moore. Peachey was unable to answer Latane’s query about the wedding, he said, since it had not yet occurred. In further evidence that such matters were not solely the province of women, Peachey told Latane that not only had the expected wedding not materialized, they may also have been mistaken about the identity of Miss Moore’s choice. The “Gentl[ema]n that was suspected, by you, me, & many others,” Peachey went on, indeed may *not* be the groom. Gossip about local couples was as popular among the young men as they themselves observed it was among women. On another occasion, Peachey revealed that he himself had been the object of

³⁰ Samuel Peachy to William Latane, 9 September 1773. Latane Family Papers.

talk. Relieved that a young woman had betrothed herself to another man, he wrote to Latane that “it was the opinion of a great many of my friends, that there was an engagement between that Lady & myself notwithstanding, the repeated assurances I gave them (or endeavoured to give them) to the contrary.” Still, as Peachey reflected on the lady who had chosen another, it reminded him “of a certain affair of an old fr[ien]d of mine, (you may guess who) don’t you think there is some little similarity[?]”³¹

Husbands and wives also shared gossip about the courtship of friends. Frances Randolph Tucker, newly married to St. George Tucker, reported on their friend Patty’s impending marriage. “She among the rest of our acquaintances has grown tired of celebacy & is shortly to be metamorphosed into Mrs Hay--what think you of this?” she inquired of her husband. “It is quite a secret, & therefore this must be under the Rose tho in my opinion, it has been long in agitation.”

While young women’s letters were full of the pressing business of courtship, young men’s were no less so. William Cabell, writing to his brother Joseph, consoled him when his an interview with his love went awry, “I am glad you communicated the whole affair to Cowper [a mutual friend], and think he gave you excellent advice.”³² Cabell’s letter’s reveals a local gossip network among men, in addition to the letters that kept absent friends fully informed.

Another instance shows that by the latter half of the eighteenth century, courtship occupied the attentions of the friends (if not of the parents) of the courting couple. Nelson Berkeley’s 1763 letter to Landon Carter illustrates how it was possible for

³¹ Samuel Peachey to William Latane, 14 March 1775, Latane Family Papers.

³² William Cabell to Joseph Cabell, 27 October 1800. Cabell Family Papers, University of Virginia.

courtships to flourish unnoticed under a parent's nose, even as it was the subject of much interest among the couple's friends. "I was pleased to hear Miss Polly was got to your house, for I was pretty well assured such as Courtship was upon hand with one Mr W-- You had several hints given you of it, from your daughter Berkeley, and some others too (as I have since understood) which I was sorry to hear you took so little notice of," Berkeley reminded Carter. "However, as you observe, all's well that ends well," he concluded with relief, "I doubt not, but this does. Sister Poll I dare say has made a very good choice, an am glad to hear too, that it is all together so agreeable to her friends."³³

In 1758, Charles Carter spelled out to his brother, Landon, his requirements for a wife that had been met in the person of a young widow who had become the "object of [his] wish." "Her Person has all ye charms a Lady of 24 could wish for. Her mind still more Amiable and blest with an uncommon sweetness of Temper . . . and has treated me with ye greatest good manners," Charles Carter praised her. He meant to have an answer from her as soon as possible. If his suit was successful, he was determined to "spend my days in Rural scenes and as soon as possible quite ye Publick service."³⁴

Courtship and Advice Literature

Not all Virginia men had such dreamy ruminations about the object of their affections. Some men could be as critical of their women as the literature was, particularly if denied the attention they thought they deserved. George Braxton

³³ Nelson Berkeley to Landon Carter, 6 February 1763. Landon Carter Papers, University of Virginia. Berkeley was referring to Carter's daughter Maria's marriage to Robert Beverly of 'Blandfield.'

³⁴ Charles Carter to Landon Carter, 26 April 1758. Landon Carter Papers, University of Virginia.

complained to Eliza Whiting in 1781 that “a few Bucks have lately arrived from France, perfect Frenchmen and have so wholly attracted the attention of the Ladyes, that nothing but their stamp will go down – it confirms me in [my] opinion I have long since formed -- A speedy reformation to the greatest part of the sex is the sincear [wish] of your Affect. Brother.” His opinion may have been sour grapes. He enjoyed the “frequent Balls, sometimes Gallovaning, often in Love, but never could tell who it was with.” Perhaps in at least one instance he did know, but was overlooked in favor of the French arrivals.³⁵ In any event, he clearly accepted the literature’s depiction of a universal female nature, particularly with respect to their vain self-absorption that rendered them so susceptible to the dash and charm of flattering males. Shunted to the sidelines by French competition, he assuaged a wounded ego by blaming women’s inherent infirmity of mind and judgment.

While Charles Carter and George Braxton exemplify what men expected from their courtships, Maria Carter’s commonplace book may well reveal what many young women sought in theirs. Her book offers a rare connection between the English *belle lettres* literary canon and the mind and heart of a young girl in Virginia in 1763. She copied a fragment of Alexander Pope’s “Heloisa to Abelard,” in which Heloisa extols heaven for first teaching letters as a gift for “some banish’d Lover, or some captive Maid.” On the simplest level, this is both thanks and plea for the gift of words and of the ability to read and write them. Living in an elite household, Carter was blessed with these gifts, but she must have realized her good fortune: these skills were denied to at least half of her sex in her own day.

³⁵ George Braxton, Richmond, to Eliza Whiting, 13 March 1781. Blair, Banister Papers, College of William and Mary.

She copied further. Words “live, they speak, they breathe what Love inspires,” and allow “the Virgin’s wish without her fears impart, Excuse the blush, and pour out all the Heart [and] Speed the soft Intercourse from Soul to Soul.”³⁶ It was a dream of a loving, communicative partner, yet ‘letters’ (whether defined as missives or the alphabet) imply a distance between lovers that protected a woman’s virtue. In a letter or with words, a woman could forge safely the closest of connections, between one soul and another, without risking a surrender to physical passion that would be her undoing. Satisfying the cravings of the soul while maintaining a safe distance may well have been Maria Carter’s eighteenth-century adaptation of the medieval ideal of courtly love. Balancing reason and passion, her formulation was both respectable and safe, the appeal of which the example of Abelard and Heloise would certainly have confirmed.³⁷ It was surely no coincidence that only two pages later she copied the warning implicit in so

³⁶ Copybook, Maria Carter of Cleve. Armistead-Cocke Papers. College of William and Mary. As chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated, Alexander Pope’s poetry was found in many respectable southern colonial libraries. Felicity A. Nussbaum described his poetry’s views of women: while his women “exhibit universal characteristics of inconstancy, pride, and self-love,” Pope revealed “an unusual awareness of the control that custom and tradition have over women’s lives, while he encourages women to act as models of good humor and good sense in spite of their unavoidable difficulties.” Nussbaum, “‘The Glory, Jest, and Riddle of the Town’: Women in Pope’s Poetry,” in Nussbaum, *The Brink of All We Hate* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 137.

³⁷ Simply described, courtly love was the love of a gentleman for a married lady. It was necessarily platonic, therefore, but its beauty and appeal was in the constant striving for an unattainable object, a striving that remained pure, unsullied by any physical contact. The true story of Abelard and Heloise is a famous one of forbidden love that did lapse into a physical affair, producing a child. In retaliation, Heloise’s enraged uncle arranged for Abelard’s castration. Although Abelard and Heloise did marry, they lived out their lives separately in religious communities.

many novels, “do bad men caress you? Beware for your lap dog is shewing his Love for you [and] may foul you with his paws.”³⁸

The contest between reason and passion was a ubiquitous theme in the eighteenth century, whether the venue was politics or romance. Indeed, the *raison d’etre* of the novel was the discussion of reason versus passion and definitions of good and evil.

Invariably, virtue was defined as the restraint of passion, for when passion triumphed, the results could be disastrous. Frederick Rutledge of Charleston, South Carolina, feared for his brother Charles, who was shortly to be married. “[He] has shown his anger to those who have ventured to say it is an imprudent match,” Frederick wrote to his brother John, “I pity him from the bottom of my soul for his very very unfortunate infatuation.”³⁹

“Whatever novel writers may say,” Burr Powell cautioned Nancy Powell of Leesburg, Virginia, “marriage should be the result of judgment & not passion – look around and see the effects of early or inconsiderate Matches.”⁴⁰ James Hubbard’s sister, reporting on the plights of female friends who had been deserted by their suitors, commented, “I am surprised that any Girl should lose her Wits for a Man, being one of the last of the trifling Animals in this trifling World that should deprive Me of Mine.”⁴¹

Women might “by nature” be more susceptible to runaway passions (Miss Hubbard excepted), but men did not appear to be altogether immune either. Catherine Fullerton of

³⁸ Maria Carter Copybook, Armistead-Cocke Papers, College of William and Mary

³⁹ Frederick Rutledge to John Rutledge, 21 March 1800. John Rutledge, Jr. Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

⁴⁰ Burr Powell to Nancy Powell, 24 October 1800. Carter-Smith Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

⁴¹ S. Hubbard to Dr. James T. Hubbard, 29 January 1809. Hubbard Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

Wilmington, North Carolina criticized a young man of her acquaintance who was “the most passionate creature on earth, so obstinate that he will not listen to reason.”⁴² In 1800 Joseph Cabell surrendered his resolution to forget his love for a woman. “If an absence of two years, and a determination never to think any thing more of her could not enable you to have ‘short conversation’ without reviving your old sensations[,] without rekindling all your former passion,” his brother William asked, throwing Joseph’s own words back to him, “how can I believe that in the course of one day’s ride in the stage you have ‘reasoned yourself out of it’[?]” Justifiably incredulous, William continued with a passion of his own, “Argue down Love! Reason a man out of it! Why, I would just as soon undertake by argument to turn a river back to the source.”⁴³

St. George Tucker appeared to surrender completely to his passion, plying his choice with words that reached new heights of extravagance. Following a less than successful courting visit early in 1778 with the young widow Frances Bland Randolph, he wrote her a long letter pleading, “let me, oh let me win your Love, since without it I must be the most abandoned vition [sic] of Despair -- Despair which preys on my vitals & which can never cease but with the Life of him, who in his last Moments, will not fail to cast a supplicating Eye to Heaven in behalf of her whom he loves more than himself.” He prostrated himself before her in the familiar ritual that cast the suitor in a supplicant’s posture, his very life in her hands. “If nothing but the sacrifice of my terrestrial Happiness can promise you that State of Mind you wish for, I will try,” he promised nobly, “tho’

⁴² Catherine Fullerton Diary, 18 June 1798-10 September 1798, De Rossett Papers. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

⁴³ William Cabell to Joseph Cabell, 27 October 1800. Cabell Family Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

perpetual Wretchedness & Despair be my portion, to have you in possession of it--Wretch that I am, I wish not to extricate myself from pain by involving you in it. Grant me, ye powers above, fortitude to withstand the Shock! Or rather let the violence of it, put a speedy period both to it, & my own wretched Existence!"⁴⁴

The rules of courtship might oblige the respectable woman to spurn or return the first proposal, as the object of Anne Blair's spying showed.⁴⁵ But what to do if the proposal is agreeable? One could do as "Madam" did: follow the rules and send the offending missive back, but only after keeping a copy that could be read and re-read, allowing her to have her cake and eat it too. Even Anne Blair, a spectator to the unfolding romance, obtained a copy over which to huddle with her correspondent.⁴⁶

Similarly, Frances Randolph also did some dissembling when Tucker first approached her. Tucker's lengthy letter after his early failed attempt at wooing tells us all we know of their interview that evening, but apparently his suit did not go well. She accepted his proposal, but at the same time withheld her affections. "The same Instant that made me the happiest, rendered me the most miserable Being in the universe," he recalled, "And whilst I lash'd you to my Breast with an exstatic Tenderness, which Love,

⁴⁴ Letter, St. George Tucker to Frances Bland Randolph, undated but early 1778. Coleman Tucker Papers, College of William and Mary.

⁴⁵ It was considered fashionable to refuse a suitor's first bid. Indeed, Jane Austen illustrated the manners of late eighteenth-century English society in this circumstance, when a clergyman sought the hand of Elizabeth Bennett and was firmly refused. He understood her refusal as the form "usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept." Again, this perspective of a woman's refusal of a marriage proposal could well have been strictly a male device to protect hurt pride. Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennett was astonished that her plain-spoken refusal was not accepted for what it was. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (New York: The Modern Library, 1995), 80.

⁴⁶ Anne Blair to Richard [Dicky] Randolph, 14 June 1769, Blair, Banister Papers.

Joy and Exultation had inspired, my Bliss was destroyed by finding that you would not partake with me in the Raptures I enjoyed.” Her hand was his, but not her heart. “The Tortures I have felt on reflecting on your excessive unhappiness have even exceeded them which you have seen me experience when Despair has deprived me of the Influence of Reason,” he told her. “The remembrance of the violent Agitation of your Mind” compelled him “in the most solemn Manner [to] promise to absolve you from the secured Engagement you have made,” despite “every fond wish, every pleasing hope, every joyful Expectation [that] was excited by the Thoughts of calling you mine.”⁴⁷ In a letter to her dated 15 January 1778, Tucker still complained “Yet am I so unfortunate as to find that the only return I can obtain is Compassion, and my only hopes founded on your Benevolence.”⁴⁸ He did not want her consent if it was granted out of pity.

What Frances Randolph’s doubts were we cannot know for sure. The surviving courtship correspondence is almost completely one-sided. A wealthy widow who lived on Matoax plantation in Chesterfield County with her three children, she had no pressing reason to remarry. Indeed, her hesitation is easier to understand than her consent: she may have known that Tucker had sworn never to marry a widow; she had no pressing financial need; and she was managing Matoax competently enough without a husband’s guiding direction. She *had* said ‘yes,’ but “in the same Instant” that she gave herself into his power, she removed herself by withholding what he wanted most: dominion over her heart. Tucker’s victory was a hollow one.

⁴⁷ St. George Tucker to Frances Bland Randolph, undated, Coleman-Tucker Papers, College of William and Mary.

⁴⁸ St. George Tucker to Frances Bland Randolph, 15 January 1778, Coleman-Tucker Papers.

There were few moments of power in most eighteenth-century women's lives. As a wealthy widow, however, Frances Randolph had more than most for she was bound neither by economic dependence nor vows of obedience. The inducement to relinquish such freedoms would have to be great indeed, and that she consented to Tucker's proposal suggests that she loved him but was unwilling to lose what leverage she may have had by admitting her love. And so a period of testing began as she exercised the powers that rituals of courtship granted, however temporarily, to women. First, she made sure that he knew that he had a rival for her affections and then made him even more miserable by banishing him from her. "In obedience to your Desire I am now preparing to leave you," he wrote dejectedly, "I leave you with the full Conviction that I have a rival whom I can not but esteem - I am apprised of his Merit and his immense attachment to you." Worse still, any argument Tucker could think of to press his own suit only "operate[d] as fully in his [rival's] Behalf." His only chance, as he saw it, was to be able to convince her that she had nothing to dread by uniting their futures. But she would not permit him any opportunity to speak to her.⁴⁹

By the late winter, perhaps more convinced of his genuine affection, Randolph at last confided her love to Tucker, but she imposed a condition: their love was not to be made public. He complained about that too. "The Sacrifice I have made has been surely & great, to leave you this Evening after having been doomed to spend two Days in your Company without venturing to pay the smallest attention to you in public," he protested, "or without compensating for that unhappiness by listening to the Charms which your

⁴⁹ Tucker to Randolph, undated c. 1778.

Conversation always yeilds.”⁵⁰ In March 1778, she tested *his* obedience. “It is impossible to give my dearest Fanny a more convincing proof of my implicit Regard to whatever she wishes,” he assured her, “than my remaining three Days so near her without seeing her in obedience to her Request.” ‘Request’ may have been too soft a word; “by her Commands,” Tucker wrote, he was “precluded from employing the most natural Method of making an Impression on her Heart.”⁵¹ On another occasion when Randolph had kept him at arm’s length, he wrote grudgingly, “I submit /tho’ not without a Pang/ to Loves Decree.”⁵²

In many ways, the Randolph-Tucker courtship followed traditional patterns: the lovesick suitor begging for relief; the doubtful lady, unwilling to submit immediately and impeccably discrete when at last she did; the last flexing of muscle before vowing forever to be obedient. But Frances Randolph was not a naïve young girl, pressured by parents, friends, or even financial straits to accept Tucker’s suit. Hers was not the tremulous hesitation of fictional heroines. Read in the context of her situation, Tucker’s letters reveal a woman determined to make no mistake; she would test this gentleman’s intentions and his motives. He was not from Virginia after all. Bermuda-born, he had been sent to the College of William and Mary for his education so he had no ready references to reassure her.⁵³ A widow with three children dependent upon her, she was responsible for decisions she made for them as well as herself. At a time when the idea

⁵⁰ St. George Tucker to Frances Bland Randolph, undated c. 1778.

⁵¹ St. George Tucker to Frances Bland Randolph, 2 March 1778.

⁵² St. George Tucker to Frances Bland Randolph, undated c. 1778.

⁵³ The rest of his family remained in Bermuda. The College of William and Mary was a more affordable alternative than an English university education.

of companionate marriage was more commonplace than its realization, Randolph had to be cautious.

Charles Carter ran into the same resistance when he wooed a Virginia widow after the death of his wife. Telling his brother Landon of his determination “to know my fate,” he also had to admit he was being kept waiting. Although the lady was “quite easy and unaffectedly Sincere,” she also told him that she “has not the least inclination to change her Condition.” He hoped to counter her hesitation by “raising a flame in her breast.”⁵⁴ Like Tucker, Carter’s campaign for his lady’s hand depended upon a surrender of reason to emotion; once her heart was engaged, so too would be her fortune and conquest would be complete. The refusal of Carter’s widow was less tart, however, than that of Ann Butler Spotswood, who, annoyed by the persistence of a suitor, told him, “Its Certain two years is a sufficient space of time for any Person [to know] there own mind. I have often told you mine, tho to little purpose.”⁵⁵

Novels contributed to the culture of heightened romantic expectations of marriage as examples of women choosing their own spouses, even in the face of parental disapproval, reveal. In what must have been a formidable showdown, Judith Carter defied the express wishes of her father Landon on the subject of her choice. Landon Carter felt justified in “only Claiming a right to dispose of my children as I ple[ase]” by reason of his age and experience.⁵⁶ But in a scheme that Landon Carter was sure

⁵⁴ Charles Carter to Landon Carter, 26 April 1758. Landon Carter Correspondence, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

⁵⁵ Ann Butler Spotswood to Rev. John Thompson, 29 July 1742, Spotswood Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

⁵⁶ Greene, ed. *Diary of Landon Carter*, 30 August 1772, 720.

involved the “devilish influence” of his son Robert Wormeley Carter and his wife Winifred Beale Carter, and his friend William Beale, Judith Carter married William’s son Rueben Beale. The marriage, Carter raged, occurred “against her duty, my will, and against her Solemn Promise.” Her attempts to effect a reconciliation with her father were fruitless. In May 1774 she wrote, begging “to be admitted to see” her father. He reminded her “of the pains taken [by her husband] to lead her against her duty” and agreed to a visit only if she came alone. He ignored Rueben Beale’s pleas that the way “to forgive an injury is to forget it,” responding that “the only way for a much injured human Creature to forget the Person who injured him is never to see him.” Judith had been a much-favored child and her decision to defy him rankled for the rest of his life. Four months before his death in 1778 he continued to lament that she “chose to go out of the world from her father.”⁵⁷

Carter thought his daughter totally deluded on the subject of love. “How easily that poor girl is made to believe her distant happiness when I am certain she sees nothing but misery,” he commented, “but possibly it was with her All for Love or the world well Lost.” She was, he had observed in February 1774, “a mere slave to her affection.”⁵⁸ Judith Carter braved her father’s wrath, following her own mind and proceeding with a marriage that by Landon Carter’s own admission was founded in love.

Marriage

Judith Carter Beale is one example of how some women viewed marriage late in the eighteenth century: “all for Love or the world well lost,” her father had growled. For

⁵⁷ Ibid., 56, 763, 814, 810, 807, 1146.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 868, 795.

all her prevarication during courtship that seemed to follow the prescribed mode for modest females, Frances Randolph Tucker recognized that her marriage was different from most. Scolded by her absent husband for not taking advantage of a messenger's services and sending him a letter, she defended herself, "very few feel the attachment we do, and therefore, few think it necessary to inform me of an opportunity."⁵⁹ That the behavior of husbands differed from that of lovers is clear in St. George Tucker's comment in 1779 to his wife that "You would suppose that I had forgot the Character of an husband, and had relapsed entirely into that of the Lover, my dearest Fanny, did you know with what Impatience I have wish'd for an Oppty of writing to you since I got to Wmsbg."⁶⁰ Having won the prize, a husband could be much less diligent in his attentions than an aspiring lover, but Frances Tucker kept her husband mindful of her. "My lips have not been touched since you blessed them. Do you be as good," she warned him saucily in the first letter she wrote to him after their marriage, "or I will retaliate two fold. The next opportunity that offers – take care – I may not allways confine it to coquetry."⁶¹

The ideal of companionate marriage, however attractive, rarely implied an equal partnership. It was clear that men expected to take the initiative and women to follow. Frances Randolph acknowledged that she ignored prevailing decorum when she wrote to St. George Tucker during their courtship that "I have not stood on the Punctilio of your writing first." But, she excused herself, "I find we have not resolution, to resist the

⁵⁹ Frances Randolph Tucker to St. George Tucker, 7 July 1781, Coleman-Tucker Papers, College of William and Mary.

⁶⁰ St. George Tucker [Williamsburg] to Frances Randolph Tucker [Matoax], 18 May 1779.

⁶¹ Frances Randolph Tucker to St. George Tucker, May 1779.

virtuous solicitations of the Man we love, -let this my St George, testify my weakness, & shew you that my protestations to the contrary, cou'd not prevent my giving you the satisfaction of knowing I am well & that I think of you with the tenderest affection."⁶²

Margaret Parker of Norfolk wrote plainly of her longing and affection for her husband in 1760. "I can tell you with a great deal of truth that the moon has never made her appearance Since you left me," she mused, "but what I have looked at her & thought of you, & often wished to know whether or not when was going to bed it would not have been rather more agreeable to have had me with you." Yet even within this loving marriage, she apologized for her lengthy letters, but depended "on your sense to make allowances for the imperfections of a poor foolish Girl, whose Study & greatest pleasure always has & shall be to please you."⁶³

Frances and John Baylor enjoyed a loving relationship, but she, too, prefaced a letter by asking her husband to "excuse the liberty of addressing you as I have done," before continuing directly with great exasperation, "you appear to be so totally ignorant of my intention . . . I must now tell you that myself and children are in the primitive state of Christians . . . we are very sensible of pressing wants – which you however appear to be insensible to – so wholly engross'd are your tho'ts on adding to your territory."⁶⁴

Affection may have enabled more frank expression of feeling, whether of love or

⁶² Frances Randolph to St. George Tucker, 10 July 1778.

⁶³ Margaret Parker to James Parker, 5 September 1760 and 12 August 1760. Quoted in Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society*, 162, 161. Parker Family Papers, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

⁶⁴ Frances Baylor to John Baylor, 8 November 1802. Baylor Family Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

frustration, but it did not alter the essential power structure of eighteenth-century marriages. Frances Baylor spoke her mind, but she remained completely dependent upon her husband.

Some married couples enjoyed latitude in their address to one another, but without apology or excuse. Sarah Rutledge tweaked her husband, who was serving in Congress in Philadelphia, for underestimating how much money they owed on an account, telling him that “the next time you remit me money to pay yr accounts, you must be a better calculator.” She also told him to treat with the owner of a house she wanted to rent. “Do not my husband let this affair pass over,” she instructed him, “but attend to it.”⁶⁵ Husbands wrote teasing letters to their wives as well. Writing to his wife Isabella Glenn of Pittsylvania County, James Glenn described a full immersion baptism he had witnessed. He told her of a drenched newly-baptized wife whose husband, it was said, “wet his feet” and “received her [hug] after the ceremony.” Glenn warned his wife wryly, “When you get baptisd –altho I am convinced my affection is as great as his or any body else, yet I am afraid I should not be so polite – you would have to walk in & out of the water by yourself.”⁶⁶

Generally, however, even the happiest married couples were aware of the delicate balance between marital love and wifely deference. Zaccheus Collins understood this when he wrote to his sister Eliza, who had married Virginian Richard Bland Lee. Urging her to plan an extended visit to her family in Philadelphia, he tried to persuade her to

⁶⁵ Sarah Rutledge to John Rutledge, 6 January 1799. John Rutledge, Jr. Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

⁶⁶ James Glenn to Isabella Glenn, 20 July 1802. Arrington Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

“seriously think of this & be prepared to lay the thing with force before Mr. Lee.”⁶⁷ As Christian Moore prepared for her death, she wrote to her husband, assuring him that “your affection has always been my greatest happiness,” but also charging him to keep her memory alive, even if he remarried. “Those virtues which your fondness will induce you to magnify, let my children early be made acquainted with, and teach them to respect the memory of her who gave them being.” She hoped he would meet with another woman “more deserving than myself,” but was also determined to preserve her place in his life, telling him “no one will ever love you more tenderly than I have done.”⁶⁸

Many women relied on the tools advice writers gave them for leverage in their marriages: the force of moral suasion, of their love, or, if all else failed, tears. A few relied on more tangible means, particularly money. Susanna Wilcox infuriated her son-in-law with her tight rein over her daughter’s money, money he clearly intended to control himself upon his marriage. In a tight-lipped exchanged with Wilcox, James Hubard began, “I little suspected at the time that I married into your family that in consequence of the marriage contract or settlement between my Wife & myself that any right was vested in you of controuling the use of the funds or money belonging to my dear Wife.” Gradually Hubard realized that indeed was precisely Wilcox’s intention. “At the time that I married, I certainly had a right to expect pecuniary or money assistance, Susan was wealthy and her funds quite sufficient; But what assistance have they afforded me?” he fumed, “– None.” He complained that he had seen little more

⁶⁷ Zaccheus Collins to Eliza Collins Lee, 14 January 1799. Richard Bland Lee Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

⁶⁸ Christian Moore to Richard Channing Moore (later Episcopal bishop), 24 August 1794. Price Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

than one hundred dollars from Susan's estate, but that Wilcox had received considerably more. "Does her estate belong to you? or who does it belong to?" he asked her furiously. The inversion of conventional gendered allocations of power was more than he could stand: "Can you suppose for one moment that I would submit to your control or directions?"⁶⁹ The exchange of letters (of which we have only his) culminated in a law suit several years later, which she won.⁷⁰

Hubard's fury at being financially stymied by his mother-in-law makes an important point about the expectations of men and women about marriage after a century of change. While courtship in the eighteenth century became freer on both sides of the Atlantic and the ideal of companionate marriage acquired greater currency as well, neither development signaled any fundamental change in the balance of power within marriage.⁷¹ Hubard put it bluntly; he had a *right* to financial assistance from his family. His rage at being 'misled' speaks eloquently to the social and legal norms that remained in place at the turn of the nineteenth century, despite a proliferation of novels and advice that urged husbands to overlook appearances in favor of character and intellect. Wilcox's

⁶⁹ James T. Hubard to Susanna Wilcox, 20 November 1806. Hubard Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

⁷⁰ Both Hubard and his mother-in-law died in 1812. Hubard left his family in dire financial straits, both from his wife's failure to inherit and from his debts. His wife was forced to apply to her brother for help to avoid eviction from her home. Survey book, Hubard Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

⁷¹ The rise of the companionate marriage has been the subject of much study by social historians in the last two decades. For two, uncontroversial syntheses, see Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) and Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). On the phenomenon in Virginia, see Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

iron determination, on the other hand, bespeaks women's willingness to make the most of Virginia law to protect themselves against grasping husbands.

Brides in the eighteenth century (and into the nineteenth) were not unaware of the risks in marriage and continued to view it as a mixed blessing: opening doors on the promise of a new family life, but closing others. John Blair had to decline the invitation to his niece's wedding in 1780, but wrote that his daughter was "very desirous of seeing the last Act of Betsey's Liberty."⁷² Elizabeth Maynadier advised a friend, with respect to life after marriage, to avoid "too much retrospect of the past or anticipation of the future."⁷³ When Anne Steuart reported rumors that she had "determined to take W J for my Lord and Master," she used a phrase that resonated much more deeply in the slave south than it would have in England.⁷⁴ With the first law in 1643 designating black women as tithables (white women were not), the Virginia legislature began to deny black women their femaleness. In the statutes of the seventeenth century, it is possible to see how the Virginia legislature carefully constructed white womanhood in clearly contradistinctive ways.⁷⁵ Even with that unbridgeable chasm between them, however,

⁷² John Blair [Williamsburg] to his sister Mrs. Mary Burwell, 3 October 1780. Blair, Banister, Braxton Papers.

⁷³ Elizabeth Maynadier to Catherine Belt, 9 August 1786, quoted in Smith, *Inside the Great House*, 78-79.

⁷⁴ Anne Steuart to Eliza Lee, 29 June 1806. Richard Bland Lee Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

⁷⁵ Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 107-118, citing Hening, *Statutes at Large*, I, 242, March 2, 1643. Edmund Morgan discussed the development of racism as an aftermath of Bacon's Rebellion in *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975).

white women did not fail to notice the abnegation of their liberties at marriage and the similarity to a state in which one's will must be bent to one's master.

Women, Marriage, and the Law

Marriage not only imposed some very real legal restrictions upon women; it altered their legal identity. The ideal of "unity of person" in English common law, described so well in William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* held that "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: Under whose wing, protection, and *cover* she performs everything."⁷⁶ Without a legal identity, a wife could not enter into contracts, initiate law suits in her own name, sell property, or even devise her own without the consent of her husband. It was no wonder, therefore, that as women faced the prospect of their wedding day, they routinely spoke of the loss of their liberty.

Women whose marriages were considerably less than perfect suffered from their legal helplessness in ways that pointed out the glaring need for reform. Although the husband was bound to protect and care for his wife, the "weaker vessel" in the King James Bible's famous phrase, in practice many marriages fell far short of the ideal. Marylynn Salmon and Linda Sturtz have shown how women's fortunes quite literally rose or fell upon the presence or absence of chancery courts in their colony and the practical fluctuations in practice of the theoretically absolute legal constructions of

⁷⁶ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, quoted in Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 200 n.1.

English common law.⁷⁷ For example, women who lived in colonies without chancery courts had no venue to adjudicate matters involving separate estates, a vehicle by which a woman, even though married, could own property apart from her husband. New England colonies, following the thinking of English Puritans on the unity of the family, had no chancery courts. Virginia, perhaps more cynical about the way the ideal of family unity could break down in practice, followed English forms and retained them.⁷⁸

A scandalous case in Williamsburg illustrates how useful even limited legal protections could be to women. Catherine Eustace married the considerably older John

⁷⁷ See Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property*, 11-12, 99-100, 120-24, and Linda Sturtz, " 'Madam & Co.' : Women, Property, and Power in Colonial Virginia," (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1994). Sturtz discusses several options available to women, including that of "power of attorney," in which many women were entrusted with the family's legal and financial affairs, operating frequently without the advice of absent husbands. See also, Joan R. Gundersen and Gwen Victor Gampel, "Married Women's Legal Status in Eighteenth-Century New York and Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 39 (1982), 114-34; and Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "The Planter's Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 34 (1977), 542-71 for earlier explorations of the question of the disparity of law and practice regarding married women's property-holding rights in the colonial period.

⁷⁸English Puritans had abolished courts of chancery in their distrust of decisions made by a chancellor rather than a jury. Virginia, following English forms and structure, maintained chancery courts in the colony allowing *femes covert* to own separate estates. Suzanne Lebsock has shown how separate estates, designed to protect the family if the husband was burdened with debt, actually worked to women's benefit in nineteenth-century Virginia. Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg*. For works that treat the social dimensions of colonial Virginia's court system, see A. G. Roeber, "Authority, Law, and Custom: The Rituals of Court Day in Tidewater Virginia, 1720-1750," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 37 (1980), 29-52 and Rhys Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*. For a brief survey of the work done in the legal history of Virginia, see Terry Snyder, "Legal History of the Colonial South: Assessment and Suggestions," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 50 (1993), 18-27. For women and the law in early America, see Mary Lynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property*; Gwen and Joan Gundersen, "Married Women's Legal Status in Eighteenth-Century New York and Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d Ser. 39 (1982), 114-134.

Blair in May 1771.⁷⁹ No sooner were they married than John Blair moved out. Catherine Blair followed suit (although to a house only one hundred feet away from the marital home) and sued for separate maintenance. Her suit denied, she briefly attempted a reconciliation. James Parker of Norfolk reported to a Scottish correspondent that the attempt failed, "A most damnable Fuss has been at Williamsburg with Dr. Blair and his rib. Nothing is talked of but separation." Town gossip had apparently condemned Catherine Blair, but later she was "acquitted of everything but not allowing him to have a fair chance ever since they were married." Parker himself admitted that "I was once of the side that blamed Kitty. I have now altered my opinion."⁸⁰

In her attempt to provide a separate maintenance for herself, Catherine Blair took her case first to the chancery courts. She filed suit in chancery in November 1772 for "a specific performance of the condn. Of a bond which was to give her half the estate of def." There the matter might have stayed but for the next development. Parker reported in February 1773 that "Doctor Blair has very opportunely taken his departure for the other world, by which 'tis to be hoped Kitty's case will be helped. She'll get his dowry at all events." In fact, she did not. John Blair had made no provision for his wife in his will and she was forced to bring her case first to the county court and then to the General Court. "I think I 'twould be best," Parker wrote privately, "to give them [Catherine Blair and her mother who had remained in Williamsburg] something and let them decamp." In

⁷⁹ John Blair was born in 1687. Rouse, Blair family in Williamsburg. His advanced age certainly explains the comment of Catherine Blair's mother that "the Dr. never has and indeed cannot do as a man should do." Quoted in Frank L. Dewey, "Thomas Jefferson and a Williamsburg Scandal: The Case of *Blair v. Blair*," in *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 89 (1981), 45.

⁸⁰ Dewey, "Thomas Jefferson and a Williamsburg Scandal," 45.

November 1773, Mrs. Eustace wrote joyfully that “my dear Kitty’s law suit was determined in her favor . . . Every indifferent spectator seemed to demand by their looks a favorable determination for Kitty . . . All is settled respecting lands, negroes, money and the rest of the personal estate.”⁸¹

That Virginians were sympathetic to Catherine Blair is significant, for she was an outsider, a New Yorker who had married John Blair, a member of a long-standing Williamsburg family.⁸² Her mother was sensitive to the ramifications of her daughter’s triumph, “in spite of large connections in a land of strangers.”⁸³ But Kitty Blair’s case turned, in the end, not upon issues of a separate maintenance, but upon her right of dower as a widow. Long embedded in English custom and law, a woman’s dower right was one area where the courts attempted to protect women’s interests; as late as 1810, Justice Brackenridge of Pennsylvania had written that the law favored “three things, life, liberty, and dower.”⁸⁴ That view was shared in Williamsburg, Virginia as well, as local spectators at Catherine Blair’s hearing and even the gruff James Parker believed that the New York interloper was entitled to her dower share.⁸⁵ Thus, while the law restricted woman’s legal capacities once married, by denying them a legal existence, in some instances, it also tried to protect women. Virginia (and Maryland) maintained a court

⁸¹ Ibid., 46, 63.

⁸² James Blair was the son of John Blair, president of the governor’s council and twice acting governor.

⁸³ Ibid., 63.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property*, 145.

⁸⁵ Widows with children received one-third of the estate in dower; childless widows received one-half. Ibid., 142-47.

system that admitted of the possibility of fissure and separate financial interests within the family.

Still, we should not make more of these protections than they actually were.

Mary Ellis was trapped in a miserable marriage and could see no way out. “The severest suffering of my life – which has befallen me since this ‘divine union’” was not something she expected her male correspondent to understand, “unless you were a female.” “All the sensibilities of my nature – of my soul- are at war!” she cried, “my feelings are too potent for the united efforts of Reason and Religion.” Her desperation was so great she cried determinedly, “I will run away from him and the children, as I did last April.” Then, perhaps taking a harder look at the consequences of that alternative, concluded faintly, “I sometimes think I will.”⁸⁶

Reviewing the extant legal history of the colonial South, Terry Snyder may have thought that during the first half of the eighteenth century “there occurred a restructuring of patriarchal authority from an earlier authoritarian model. . . to a somewhat more paternalistic model.” But a critical change in the property law in 1705 suggests otherwise, at least for women. The change in the status of slaves from personal property (which could be devised for women’s ownership) to real (which a woman could only hold for her use) kept valuable property in men’s hands. “Placing property interests of widows squarely in the service of the family,” Snyder admitted, was an important way to “perpetuate planter hegemony.”⁸⁷ The point was not lost on St. George Tucker, lawyer and judge in Virginia, who, in a tug-of-war exchange of letters with his future son-in-law,

⁸⁶ Mary Ellis to William Wirt, 9 April 1802. Baylor Family Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

⁸⁷ Snyder, “Legal History of the Colonial South,” 27.

had insisted on a marriage settlement to protect his daughter before he would allow the wedding to take place.⁸⁸

Within such a society it took courage, perhaps bred of desperation, to break out of the mold, even to claim such legal rights as the colonies allowed. Women as fearlessly combative as Catherine Blair were exceptional, but they existed. In 1722 Easter Chinn, the wife of prominent Raleigh Chinn, “being by the Sd Rawleigh’s Unsufferable Cruelty and Severity towards her forced to leave him,” approached the chancery court in Lancaster County, Virginia to intervene against her husband’s intention to “convey away his Estate with Design to Defraud her of her Sd Alimony.”⁸⁹ She would have disagreed with North Carolina judge Jon Jacock who in 1801 placed “the great quantity of petitions for divorce” in the same category as “other trifles” and “nothing of moment.”⁹⁰ Mary Horton sued James Pinkard in 1751 for failing to honor his agreement to teach her daughter, indentured to his service, “Reeding or soen [sewing] or [how to] knit as a woman ought to do.”⁹¹ In 1762 Elizabeth Gilbert, threatened with a lawsuit by Rawleigh Shearman for title to one-third of her land, spiritedly retorted, “so he might, for that she hoped there was Law for her as well as him.”⁹² Benjamin Powell was forced to sue his

⁸⁸ St. George Tucker and Joseph Cabell correspondence, October and November 1806. Joseph Cabell Carrington Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

⁸⁹ Chinn vs. Chinn, Lancaster Count Chancery Court Records, 12 September 1722.

⁹⁰ Jon Jackocks to Elizabeth Jacocks, 4 December 1801. Jacocks Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

⁹¹ Mary Horton v. James Pinkard, May 1751. Lancaster County court records, State Library of Virginia.

⁹² Deposition of Martin George in Rawleigh Shearman v. Elizabeth Gilbert, 1762. Lancaster County Chancery court records, State Library of Virginia.

intransigent daughter, Ann Burwell, when she refused to vacate the property he wanted to sell as executor of her husband's will. Her answer to her father's complaint was unadorned and uncompromising: she "admits. . . that the complainant hath applied to this defendant for the sale. . . [and] that she hath refused and still doth refuse her consent to such sale."⁹³ These women viewed the law in different ways: Chinn and Horton looked upon it as a father, relying upon its paternal protective arm; Gilbert and Burwell, however, claimed the law as their own instrument, confidently refusing to be cowed by men who would use its weight against them. They show a refashioning of what it meant to be female by the latter half of the century.

Female Kin and Friendship Networks

Women also turned to each other to build a sense of themselves as women. Forging networks of friendship both relieved the isolation and tedium of plantation life and shored up a sense of their own competency. Visiting with other women was one way to do this, whether gathering within the privacy of a friend's plantation or at the public spaces of Sunday church services and court and market days. As Daniel Blake Smith has pointed out, the process of building these networks began within the extended family, as young girls "from infancy were embedded in a network of relationships with other female servants and kin."⁹⁴ Near friends were frequent visitors; Joan Gundersen counted forty-three women who made a total of ninety-nine visits to Westover plantation

⁹³ Bill of Complaint, undated, Robinson Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society. John Burwell, Ann's husband, died in 1788.

⁹⁴ Smith, *Inside the Great House*, 81.

in Virginia, home to William and Maria Byrd.⁹⁵ Caroline Clitherall of Wilmington, North Carolina was devoted to her “small circle of friends,” and acknowledged “little inclination to enlarge” upon it.⁹⁶ Isabella Glenn’s frequent visits prompted her husband to write that despite his “general custom hitherto, to indulge you in every wish of your heart,” nonetheless, he wanted her to return home and hoped that “your wish to see home, is equal to my desire of seeing you.”⁹⁷

Over the course of the century women participated less in the public spaces that became dominated by men and retreated to more private forms of visiting.⁹⁸ Tea drinking became an elaborate ritual, as a revolution in consumerism by mid-century provided all the *acoutrement* necessary for the ceremony of serving it in the best fashion.⁹⁹ Presided over by women, it became the venue of choice for respectable

⁹⁵ Gundersen, “Kith and Kin: Women’s Networks in Colonial Virginia,” in Clinton and Gillespie, eds., *Devil’s Lane, Sex and Race in the Early South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 96.

⁹⁶ Caroline Clitherall Diary, p. 35, typescript. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

⁹⁷ James Glenn to Isabella Glenn, 23 January 1801. Arrington Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. This was a common refrain in his letters to her when she was away. See also his letters of 30 October 1799, 10 May 1801, and 20 July 1802.

⁹⁸ Gundersen, “Kith and Kin,” 90-108.

⁹⁹ Ann Smart Martin, “Buying into the World of Goods: Eighteenth-Century Consumerism and the Retail Trade from London to the Virginia Frontier,” (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1993); Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994).

women who would not enter the fray of the local taverns.¹⁰⁰ Nor was fashionable tea drinking the exclusive preserve of the elite; itinerant Anglican minister, Charles Woodmason, complained of finding ceramic teapots in the shabby homes of backcountry South Carolinians.¹⁰¹

Visiting allowed women to cement relationships that became increasingly intense as the century wore on. Concurrent with this development was that of women's increased writing literacy, which allowed women to maintain their friendships across long distances. The irony of this gain, Joan Gundersen has observed, was that it served to physically isolate women who did not need to rely upon face-to-face contact to sustain their friendships.¹⁰² Still, it is readily apparent that letters served a crucial function in keeping women connected with one another in ways that were very meaningful to them. When Frances Baylor left England with her Virginia husband John Baylor, she sent a stream of letters homeward to friends and relatives. "My Dear Fannys agreeable Letters, were quite a Cordial to her disconsolate Friends," an English friend who signed herself 'S.P.' wrote to her in November 1778.¹⁰³ Not even war between the two countries prevented their correspondence. Even when the distance was considerably shorter, as when Betsey Ambler fled Yorktown Virginia for relative safety of Richmond, friends

¹⁰⁰ This was true in England as well, as coffeehouses were essentially masculine domains. David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 112-13.

¹⁰¹ Charles Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958).

¹⁰² Gundersen, "Kith and Kin," 90.

¹⁰³ 'S.P.' to Frances Baylor, 29 November 1778. Baylor Family Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

stayed in touch with one another. Mildred Smith, remaining in Yorktown made it clear that she expected to hear from Ambler, regardless of her situation. "How do I look forward with delight to the period when our [infant] attachment shall be ripened into maturer friendship," she said, "as soon as the bustle & fatigue [of] moving is over I shall expect a long letter from you."¹⁰⁴ Ambler complied from Richmond, "trying my hand [at romantic description] & hoping to induce you to do the same."¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Hare of York, Virginia was grateful for Peggy Cabell's letter that renewed a correspondence Hare had thought discontinued. "You'll discover I have thrown a few words together in great haste," Hare wrote at the end of a long letter, "merely to convince you that I prize your correspondence and I treat you as I'd wish you to treat me."¹⁰⁶

Women's correspondence served various purposes in addition to keeping relatives and friends abreast of family news. They appear to have been equally comfortable discussing fashion and politics. Elizabeth Steele of North Carolina freely offered her opinion of the war to her brother in Philadelphia. "The British government may not acknowledge our Independence till the end of the present war with France," she astutely observed as early as 1778, "which their political phrenzy may continue for two or three years to come till they be reduced to the extremity."¹⁰⁷ She pressed him frequently for news of the war in the north during the Revolution, explaining "You know I am a great

¹⁰⁴ Mildred Smith to Betsey Ambler, Letter No. 1, 1780. Ambler Family Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

¹⁰⁵ Betsey Ambler to Mildred Smith, Letter No. 2, 1780. Ambler Family Papers.

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Hare to Peggy Cabell, 6 March 1803. Joseph Carrington Cabell Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth Steele to Ephraim Steele, 30 July 1778. Steele Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

politician,” she told him. She returned the favor by keeping him updated of its progress when it shifted south.¹⁰⁸ Jane Charlton of Williamsburg maintained her close connections with Scottish friends, who desired “an account from your descriptive Pen of all the events that you have experience’d both of a Publick & private nature” immediately following the war’s conclusion.¹⁰⁹ Frances Baylor and her cousins kept up a correspondence for decades in which her English cousins informed her of the latest fashions and politics. In the same 1793 letter, Frances Baylor learned that “The Girdle instead of Sash is more fashionable in full dress,” and that “the departments of France are most of them in a state of revolt against the Convention,” both news items accompanied by rich detail.¹¹⁰

Women found great solace in their letters to one another as well. Eliza Collins Lee must have been greatly consoled by the empathy of her friend, Ann Steuart (later Robinson), who understood her homesickness for Philadelphia. Because of “a very apparent change in the spirits of my friend, “ Steuart wrote, she could not think of her without placing herself in that situation, “far removed from those to whom I am bound by the ties of blood and friendship.”¹¹¹ In another letter, she tried to cheer Eliza by telling her that she had “several neighbours I would gladly exchange for you. . . [they] want that

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 25 October 1780.

¹⁰⁹ Mrs. M. Klotz to Jane Charlton, 18 August 1783. Robinson Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹¹⁰ Letter to Frances Baylor, received 18 September 1793. Baylor Family Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

¹¹¹ Ann Steuart to Eliza Collins Lee, 29 June 1806. Richard Bland Lee Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

congeniality which I still think indispensable.” Similarly, Jane Randolph assured her dear friend, Mary Harrison, “Your advice, nay your censures are acceptable always, because they are evidences of your regard & your candor, which I deem the corner stone of real friendships.”¹¹² Neither for Ann Steuart were friends who were “cultivated only to save appearances.” Even her Philadelphia friends, the newly married Ann Steuart Robinson assured Eliza, could not love her “more sincerely” than she. Ann’s letters relieved the loneliness of life at Eliza’s new Virginia home of Sully. The two women found strength in their ability to lean on one another in a female network that at times excluded even the mention of their men. “Mrs. R has been remiss in not naming me in her letter,” Ann Robinson’s new husband wrote in a postscript to her long letter to Lee.¹¹³ More significant still in these female friendships is the emphasis on congeniality and candor, a clear rejection of the advice to clothe disagreeable truths with a veneer of patient acceptance. It was the substance, not the appearance, of friendship that mattered.

Women derived from their friendships strength and competency which manifested itself in ways that advice writers would have found decidedly unfeminine. Frances Baylor’s crisp tone with her husband two decades into their marriage, reporting on their business affairs and demanding his immediate response, is indicative of her command of their family economy. “The wheat here is eaten up with the Weevil,” she wrote, “Mr. ---r say’s he dare not sow it without your order – you had better say how you will act.”¹¹⁴

¹¹² Jane Randolph to Mary Harrison, 21 November 1805. Harrison Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹¹³ Ann Steuart Robinson to Eliza Collins Lee, 1 February 1807. Richard Bland Lee Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹¹⁴ Frances Baylor to John Baylor, 8 November 1802. Baylor Family Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

The wife of North Carolinian Cornelius Harnett apparently had a better head for business than did his partner, William Wilkinson. Against Harnett's advice, Wilkinson had accepted a note from a man "whose estate was universally believed insolvent;" indeed it was, and Wilkinson's only recourse was a lawsuit that would prove fruitless against a debt-ridden estate. "Such a transaction can not be reconciled To Common Sense. You have only lost 3500 Dollars by this prudent Step. Shew this paragraph to Mrs Harnett if you dare," Harnett challenged him.¹¹⁵ John Baylor may have been discomfited by his wife's ill-concealed impatience with him; Cornelius Harnett was proud of his wife's acumen. Regardless of their husbands' reactions, neither woman hid their strong mindedness from their husbands.

Southern women's developing competency is also clear in the ways in which they took care of one another. In 1690, only one quarter of women's wills from present-day Powhatan County, Virginia, showed bequests to other women; by the 1720s and 1730s, that number had risen to forty percent; in the following three decades, it had risen still higher to about sixty-six percent. By century's end, female bequests to other women had become the norm.¹¹⁶ Jane Charlton of Williamsburg attended to needs of female relatives and friends both in Virginia and in Britain during her lifetime and after her death. Charles Grey was the Scottish agent who kept Charlton informed of her sister-in-law's financial needs and cleared her bills in London. Receiving a draft on Benjamin Farrow of

¹¹⁵ Cornelius Harnett to William Wilkinson, 18 March 1778. Cornelius Harnett Letters, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

¹¹⁶ Gunderson, "Kith and Kin," 97. Gunderson's analysis covered wills filed in eighteenth-century Henrico, Goochland, Cumberland, and Chesterfield counties between 1703 and 1800, and four additional wills from scattered counties.

London, it “was immediately sent up for acceptance and Mr Strother Merchant in Harwick not doubting the validity of the Bill & of its being duly honoured,” Grey reported. He “settled the matter with Phillis Wear [Charlton’s sister-in-law] who is highly sensible of your kindness and desires me to express her gratitude for your good intentions towards her.”¹¹⁷ At her death, Charlton provided L600 to her dead husband’s relatives, including L200 to ‘Phillis.’ To her sister Elizabeth Farrow in London, she devised L600 and to Mary Cooke in Williamsburg, she left a long list of personal items from her bed and its clothes to her “thick black silk gown [and her] last new leather shoes.”¹¹⁸ Frances Baylor devised “the full and compleat authority” over her slaves to her daughter Susanna. Should she remarry, however, the executors were to sell the slaves and dispose of the profits “in a manner the most Conducive to my daughter’s Comfort free from the Controul of any husband.”¹¹⁹

Intergenerational Relationships

That education was of crucial importance to women is revealed in the ways that they devised means for educating children, both boys and girls. In 1761, Mary Gregorie of Chowan County, North Carolina devised L50 “current money of Virginia to be

¹¹⁷ Charles Grey to Jane Charlton, 3 February 1797. Robinson Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹¹⁸ Will, Jane Charlton, 24 August 1802. Robinson Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹¹⁹ Will, Frances Baylor, 13 February 1809. Baylor Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

expended in educating” her nephew James.¹²⁰ Elizabeth Stith of Smithfield, Virginia provided L5 for her goddaughter, Martha Taylor, for four years schooling and L120 to her free school, the interest of which was to pay each year for “the schooling of any six poor children,” (sex unspecified).¹²¹ Suzannah Riddell of Yorktown and Williamsburg devised L1000 in 1784 for the education of the illegitimate son of her ward, Rachel Warrington.¹²²

Other women took a deeply personal interest in the education of young women in particular. Jane Randolph described her efforts to rescue a young woman from exactly the sort of misguided counsel that had led the fictional character Charlotte Temple to her demise. “You, my friend, are a mother,” Randolph wrote to Mary Harrison, “you have [a] daughter, you will know how to appreciate the effort to rescue an exemplary young female from the danger of evil counsellors; to screen in some slight degree from unexampled calumny, an object, whose chief error was generated by the guileless simplicity of her heart, & the unequalled easiness of her temper.”¹²³ The education Randolph proposed to provide was the education for identity that was so critical for eighteenth-century women. But the substance of such an education was changing; the “guileless simplicity of heart” that was so quintessentially feminine to James Fordyce,

¹²⁰ Will, Mary Gregorie, 25 November 1761. Johnson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

¹²¹ “Will of Mrs. Elizabeth Stith,” *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine* 5 (October 1896), 115.

¹²² Will of Suzannah Riddell, 1784. York County Records, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

¹²³ Jane Randolph to Mary Harrison, 24 November 1805. Harrison Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

was no longer a goal, although training a woman in virtuous conduct still was. Innocence that was simultaneously childlike and feminine could lead all too often to disaster, as Randolph's ward and Rachel Warrington had discovered. Another difference, accomplished by the early nineteenth century, was that women like Jane Randolph began to assume responsibility for providing that training. Eliza Heywood's complaint from her 1744 *Female Spectator* that men ought "to be more careful of the education of those females to whom they are parents or guardians!" had fallen on receptive ears; no longer willing to rely upon men to protect and educate them, women took the educational reins themselves and embraced their roles as teachers.¹²⁴

Quaker Joshua Evans decried the "overmuch delicacy in educating children" he observed in his travels in Virginia in October 1794. The only daughter of a wealthy family had been brought up in such a way that she was "in a weak state of health, occasioned in part by such delicacy, as it is thought likely will shorten her days."¹²⁵ Both novels and real-life stories pointed out the shortfalls of the female education recommended in the most popular traditional advices. The preserved innocence and an obediently submissive character attributed to an ideal wife failed to equip young women for the eighteenth-century realities of courtship and marriage. As early as 1721, Elizabeth Everard, writing to Lewis Latane on the Northern Neck of Virginia, deplored

¹²⁴ Mary Priestley, ed., *The Female Spectator, Being selections from Mrs. Eliza Heywood's periodical, 1744-1746*. (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., 1929), 56.

¹²⁵ Joshua Evans Book, vol. 1, p. 79. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

that “our Age now is very visicious [sic] and unthinking youth Soon beguiled!”¹²⁶ But the letters of Richard and Elizabeth Ambler at mid-century to their sons in England show how parental teaching responsibilities were divided. The letters of the father are lengthy admonitions on character, study and spending habits, even a recommendation to read *The Spectator* for an example of how to write with “great beauty and Correctness in the Stile.”¹²⁷ Their mother, however, simply chided her son for his “neglect in not writing oftner. . . but one letter from you for more than a year.” Her single request of him was that he “make a proper use” of the purse she sent him.¹²⁸

A generation later, Judith Bankes, taking care of Landon Carter’s motherless nieces and nephews, considered herself “impertinent . . . to offer advice to Col[onel] Landon Carter,” but pressed him nonetheless to reconsider a course with the children that would result, she was sure, in “the Intire ruin of ye poor unhappy Orphans.” Nothing, she advised him, should prevent him from “Acting as a tender Parent.”¹²⁹ Bankes was a housekeeper at Cleve, the plantation home of Landon’s brother Charles Carter; even so, she proffered her thoughts on their care and discipline to the prominent Landon Carter in a way that Elizabeth Ambler had not done with her own son almost twenty years earlier.

A generation further, Elizabeth Foote Washington wrote down her rules of conduct for herself, most of which focused on her treatment of her slaves and her efforts

¹²⁶ Elizabeth Everard to Lewis Latane, 29 October 1721. Latane Family Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

¹²⁷ Richard Ambler to Edward and John Ambler, 1 August 1748. Elizabeth Barbour Ambler Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Ambler to Edward Ambler, 23 October 1749.

¹²⁹ Judith Bankes to Landon Carter (Sabine Hall), 22 March 1766. Landon Carter Correspondence, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

to please her husband.¹³⁰ But what is most striking is her persistent and obviously intentional efforts to prepare a manuscript for her infant daughter Lucinda “should I leave my dear child before she arrives to the year of discretion [sic] – I hope she will read this manuscript more than once, - & what ever other manuscript Books I leave behind.”¹³¹

Elizabeth Washington herself carried about a small manuscript book and had “derived great comfort” from perusing it several times during the day. This intensive reading was what she had in mind for her daughter, but the words that daily would guide and strengthen Lucinda would not be those of an English cleric, but of her mother. In writing her own advice for Lucinda, Elizabeth Foote Washington asserted an authority that traditional prescriptive works never ceded to a woman, writing a book she meant to serve as a surrogate parent.

Elizabeth Foote Washington’s book for her daughter was an early American version of the scribal publication that existed in England a century earlier. Seventeenth-century English-women circulated letters, poems, and other texts in manuscript form (including advices to children) to avoid the stigma that associated appearing in print with sexual promiscuity.¹³² By the eighteenth century, however, English women were appearing in print, usually novels, a natural outgrowth of their exploration of emotion in

¹³⁰ Journal of Elizabeth (Foote) Washington, pp. 11-22, 1783. Washington Family Papers, Library of Congress.

¹³¹ Ibid., 28.

¹³² Harold Love, *The Culture and Commerce of Texts: Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, reprint, 1998), 54-58, 202.

the relationships they nurtured through their letter writing.¹³³ But English women writers lived in a very different, urbanized culture from that of the colonial plantation South. Encased in a hierarchy that was dominated by white male heads of households, southern women had even less opportunity to escape from their inferior positions.¹³⁴ It would take over a hundred years for this scribal culture to begin to take form in women's writings in the early American South and even the few examples we have would not approximate the kind of circulation that made English poet Katherine Philips the most admired female poet of her century.¹³⁵ Elizabeth Foote Washington's book may have echoed many of the more traditional ideas about womanhood, but it is significant that she took up the pen, "intruding upon the rights of men," as Anna Duchess of Winchelsea had exclaimed.¹³⁶

¹³³ Dale Spender, *Mothers of the Novel: 100 good women writers before Jane Austen* (London: Pandora, 1986), 4. Indeed, as her title suggests, Spender argues that women and not men were the creators, "mothers," of the novel in eighteenth-century England.

¹³⁴ Margaret Ripley Wolfe, *Daughters of Canaan: A Saga of Southern Women* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995) 6. See also on this point, Cynthia Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 36-68; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*; and Clinton, *The Plantation's Mistress*.

¹³⁵ Love, *Culture and Commerce of Texts*, 56. Scribal publication in the northern and Middle Atlantic colonies was slightly further developed. See Esther Edwards Burr's correspondence with Sarah Prince in Carol F. Karlson and Laurie Curmpadeer, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) and Carla Mulford, *Only for the Eye of a Friend: The Poems of Annis Boudinot Stockton* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995). The friend for whom Stockton compiled her volume was Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson, the center of a late eighteenth-century literary circle in the Middle Atlantic.

¹³⁶ Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, "The Introduction," in James Fitzmaurice and Josephine A. Roberts, eds., *Major Women Writers of Seventeenth-Century England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 336. By the nineteenth century when American women writers did appear in print. Nina Baym argues that "the point for all

Other mothers similarly wrote advice to their children in the last quarter of the eighteenth century in letters conveying their wishes for their children's behavior. In 1786, Elizabeth Hopkins gave her consent to her child who wished to extend a visit to relatives in Philadelphia, "hoping thee will conduct thy self prudently and that Virtue and Innocence may be thy Guide."¹³⁷ North Carolinian Anna Cameron prayed for her son Duncan that God "never leave you my dear without a faithfull guide to direct you," then added her own advice, "O my Child never lose sight of the virteous education your dear father gave you when you fall in the Company of Wild Young men wich sometimes you must let none of their doings saings nor setements stick by you."¹³⁸ Richard Terrell urged his niece Patsy Minor to heed the advice of her parents. "They are good Judges, & more than commonly interested in your happiness," he comforted her, after the collapse of her most recent romance which they feared they could not sanction.¹³⁹

Ralph Izard of South Carolina solicited his mother's advice, begging for "long letters of advice for you know my faults much better than I do myself." Delighted with the reports of his conduct that had filtered back from Boston (where the young Izard awaited posting to a naval appointment), his mother contented herself with supplying him

these women is not whether there beliefs are more or less conventional . . . [but] that they insist on their rights to formulate and express political and public opinions and use the power of the press to circulate them." Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 40.

¹³⁷ Elizabeth Hopkins to (unnamed) child, 1786. Tyson Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

¹³⁸ Anna Cameron to Duncan Cameron, 6 July 1790. Cameron Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

¹³⁹ Richard Terrell to Patsy Minor, 3 July 1791. Carr-Terrell Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

with suggestions for his reading. "I wish you have a good general knowledge of ancient, as well as modern history. Mr. Rollins's ancient & Roman history is the best I know, & it would give me great pleasure to send it to you. . . The french edition is much superior to the translation," she added, "& I believe you sufficiently master of that language to understand a book so well written."¹⁴⁰

By the end of the century, both men and women saw education as crucial to the formation of character. According to the 1806 edition of *A Series of Letters on Courtship and Marriage*, education would "correct and strengthen the judgment, enlarge the faculties of the mind, [and] raise the soul to a free and generous way of thinking."¹⁴¹ In 1798 Catherine Fullerton pitied a young man lacking the proper education that "would have made him a valuable member of society."¹⁴² William Cabell, writing in 1806, believed that a rigorous course of study was necessary "to form the character of a man of extensive and general information, and such a character only can arrive at true eminence."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰Ralph Izard, Jr. to Alice Izard, 6 July 1801; Alice Izard to Ralph Izard, Jr, 5 January 1803. Ralph Izard, Sr. Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁴¹ *A Series of Letters on Courtship and Marriage: to Which are Added, Witherspoons' Letters on Marriage. Swift's Letter to a newly married Lady. Mrs. Piozzi's Letter to a Gentleman newly married, &c. &c.* (Hartford: Lincoln and Gleason, 1806), 24. Although this volume was printed in 1806, the original book was published by Benjamin Franklin in 1746; there is still some debate about whether he was actually the author of the *Letters*. See Kevin Hayes, *A Colonial Woman's Bookshelf* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 68.

¹⁴² Catherine (Fullerton) DeRossett diary, p. 2. DeRossett Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

¹⁴³ William Cabell to Joseph Cabell, 23 October 1806, Cabell Family Papers. Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

Conclusion

While it was true that education for men and women retained their gendered purposes, that is, men were groomed for assuming public and civic responsibilities while women were prepared to be mistresses of their households and good social companions, elite southern women on the eve of the Revolution were better educated than any generation that had gone before.¹⁴⁴ Their increased education and literacy fostered an evolving sense of competency as southern women read and reconciled the varieties of advice with their own experience. Conduct literature formed the corpus of women's educational literature in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The convergence of themes in the secular and devotional literature that identified sensibility of feeling with women and religion with emotion gave southern women the means with which to alter conventional notions of femininity. Since women were understood to be pious by nature, they could not be anything but virtuous. To be otherwise was to deny their very nature, in their own terms, their femininity. Religion, virtue, and respectability were bound together in a way that could not be disentangled in the literature or in their daily living. Martha Laurens Ramsay of South Carolina had used religious rhetoric as she sought to combat a depression brought on by her helplessness at her husband's indebtedness.¹⁴⁵ Other women turned this to their advantage in different ways, as did Elizabeth Foote Washington when she took this understanding as her moral authority to

¹⁴⁴ Cynthia Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 54-67. Kierner believes that by beginning her study in 1750, Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters* mistakenly attributed the growth in women's education to revolutionary ideology, missing important developments in the late colonial period, (237-38, n. 73).

write, to lead, and to teach her daughter, even in abstentia in the event of her death. By the end of the century, educated southern women thus created their own form of feminine respectability, culled selectively from the very advice literature that taught them, and refined by their experience.

¹⁴⁵ Joanna Bowen Gillespie, "1795: Martha Laurens Ramsay's 'Dark Night of the Soul' " *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 48 (January 1991): 68-92.

CONCLUSION:
TAKING UP THE PEN

“Rare it is to see a Female Bard/ Or that my Sex in Print have e’re appear’d,”

Mary Wadsworth Brewster lamented in her collection of poems printed in Boston in 1758.¹ Women in the South had particular cause to lament, stocked as southern book shops were with male-authored advice. That advice altered over the eighteenth century, reflecting changes in English society to which patriarchal structures had adapted, from the traditional advice of the Restoration period, in which women’s virtue needed protection against the assault of aristocratic rogues, to the end of the century in which it required protection from women such as Mary Wollstonecraft whose writings, it was thought, abjured her own sex. The English Civil War had offered unprecedented opportunities for the rethinking of gender relations and power within the family and the polity. The period from one revolution (the Glorious, of 1688) to another (the infamous French) encompassed enormous political and social change. The Restoration of the English monarchy and its firm commitment to Protestantism ushered in a period of accommodation in which sentiment prevailed over reason for women as they were wooed by patriarchy’s softer words. That traditional advice continued to be printed in many editions throughout the social and political changes of the century, however, suggests that

¹ Martha Wadsworth Brewster, *Poems on Divers Subjects* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1758), quoted in William J. Scheik, *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 20.

all was not well. Indeed, women's increasing presence in English public spaces -- including print-- clearly unnerved many men.

The colonial and early national South may not have had the urban context that gave rise to the public culture of theatres, assemblies, parks, and salons that eighteenth-century London knew. But it did import English advice literature. Southern men faced a different set of challenges to the structures they had been try to create out of the chaotic conditions of the seventeenth century. Within a southern world divided by race as well as gender, meticulous adherence to a strictly delineated hierarchy was even more critical: rebellion by blacks, women, or non-elite men could topple the whole precarious structure. The traditional advice of the Restoration era served male purposes well in the South as it fostered a patriarchal ethic in a society that constantly threatened to refute it. Indeed, the expansion of print throughout the century reinforced traditional ideas of gender, available as these ideas were to all ranks of people from tidewater Virginia to the Carolina backcountry.

It was within this context that white women learned what it meant to be female. With advice literature as their texts, they learned of a natural and divine order by which their world and everything in it was arranged. Their books, whether Scripture, devotional materials, or English advice, assumed a definition of humanity as masculine.² Subordination to men was a woman's natural state; women degraded themselves when

² Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 127.

they stepped out of it.³ No wonder that even the eminent American poet Anne Bradstreet should believe that “Men doe best, and Women know it well.”⁴

While the canon remained consistent in its essential construction of femininity, women read and internalized it in different ways. Eliza Lucas accepted her female inferiority, although she critiqued Samuel Richardson’s formulation of virtue and its rewards; the stalwart Mildred Smith resisted the charms of the Frenchmen in Yorktown, Rachel Warrington succumbed to them, and Betsey Ambler teetered giddily and might have fallen but for her father’s attention to her substantial education; Caroline Clitherall reworked her own quiet courtship into the stuff of novels. The evidence of some women’s acceptance of the male articulation of the gender order is clear in self-deprecating letters and patterns of courtship and marriage. Yet slim as the evidence may be, there is enough to show a reformulation of traditional advice and to suggest the strong influence of the new, even within the strictures of a patriarchal slave society. The definitions of female and feminine were still being worked out in the eighteenth century; the fact that those terms were used interchangeably is significant, since the separation of the biology of sex from the construction of gender was only beginning to be suggested, particularly with respect to women’s education. Southern women redefined those words for themselves, never forgetting their respectability and virtue, taking notions of the female nature and turning them to their own advantage.

³ Miss C. Palmer, *Letters upon Several Subjects from a Preceptress to her Pupils who have left School* (1797), quoted in J.M. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 146-47.

⁴ Quoted in Scheick, *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America*, 20.

It was in the convergence of religious with secular themes that women found their authority to pick up their pens and become producers of their own advice literature. William J. Scheick has pointed out that within this culture in which writing was presumed to be masculine, "colonial women who approached writing as an activity in itself were probably very self-conscious in their undertaking."⁵ Even Joan Hoff Wilson, who has never seen any positive benefits for women resulting from the American Revolution, has said that "religion still provided the best opportunities socially and culturally for women."⁶ Elizabeth Foote Washington's rules of conduct for herself and her infant daughter are most significant viewed in this light. We should not be surprised that, like the women memoirists Felicity Nussbaum studied, her writing "mimick[ed] the dominant ideologies of themselves."⁷ Washington's rules may appear to have followed very traditional lines of thought: on female subordination to men, for example, she was quite emphatic, "I blame my sex most . . . - our mother eve when she transgress'd was told her husband should rule over her, - then how dare any of her daughters to dispute the point." But if Elizabeth Foote Washington reminded herself constantly of the virtue of humility, it was not to prostrate herself on the altar of male superiority, but to exert self-control to cope with the frustrations of living in her in-laws' household, dealing with recalcitrant slaves, and incidents in which she had been "used extremely ill indeed."⁸

⁵ Scheick, *Authority and Female Authorship*, 21.

⁶ Joan Hoff Wilson, "The Illusion of Change: Women and the American Revolution," in Alfred F. Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1976), 409.

⁷ Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, 133.

⁸ Diary, Elizabeth Foote Washington, page 45-46, 9. Washington Family Papers, Library of Congress.

Washington's legacy to her unborn child was as intentional as northern colonial women's writing suggests. She stated plainly "shou'd I have children, & especially Daughters – it can be no disadvantage to them for to know something of my general conduct in my family." As she wrote her rules of life, she believed that "whatever Legacy in advice a dead Mother leaves her Daughters, must have great wait [weight] with them."⁹ Her first daughter died after eleven months; when in September 1788 another girl was born to her, she began her advice journal again. "There is no real happiness without religion – a religion that effectively touches the heart," she wrote to her infant Lucinda. "Endeavor to live in peace & friendship with every creature, - intertain a good will and fellow feeling for all mankind, be kind & good to everyone who is in want, never say or do anything that will give another pain, though" she added, no doubt casting back to her own experience, "your evil nature should want to do it."¹⁰ Religion also underlay her advice about dealing with her slaves, as she tried to "perswaid my servants to do their business through a principal of religion." When teased by a male relative that she "only effected to conform to my husbands will, to be thought an obedient wife," she objected strongly. It was not appearance that motivated her, but "Scripture direction."¹¹

Washington's Anglican faith was in the forefront throughout her advice book; it informed her struggles to cope with her servants and the deaths of her children. Its rationality also helped her to temper her resentful feelings that threatened to overwhelm her. Jan Lewis has argued that the rational piety of Anglicanism appealed to men and not

⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰ Ibid., 29-30.

¹¹ Ibid., 33, 48.

to those on the periphery of power.¹² Yet despite the literature's insistence upon women's innate sensibility of feeling, it is clear that other women also claimed as theirs a competence to reason. Martha Laurens tried to impose rationality upon her depression, as she attempted to reconcile financial and personal crises with her faith. The only way Mary Ellis knew how to deal with the miseries of her marriage was by the joint application of "reason and religion," although neither offered her an answer to her problems.¹³

Willing to accept the literature's notion about their innate piety and the moral power it gave them in their families, women also sought to apply their powers of reason to their faith. In this appropriation of reason, women like Elizabeth Foote Washington may also have been a last gasp of the Enlightenment in America, before it dissolved into the sentimental model of nineteenth-century true womanhood. And in their appropriation of religious authority, a century after their English sisters, women in the South began to follow their lead, sharpening their quills, dipping them into the ink, and forming the words they intended to guide the lives of future generations.

¹² Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 43-46.

¹³ Mary Ellis to William Wirt, 9 April 1802. Baylor Family Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

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